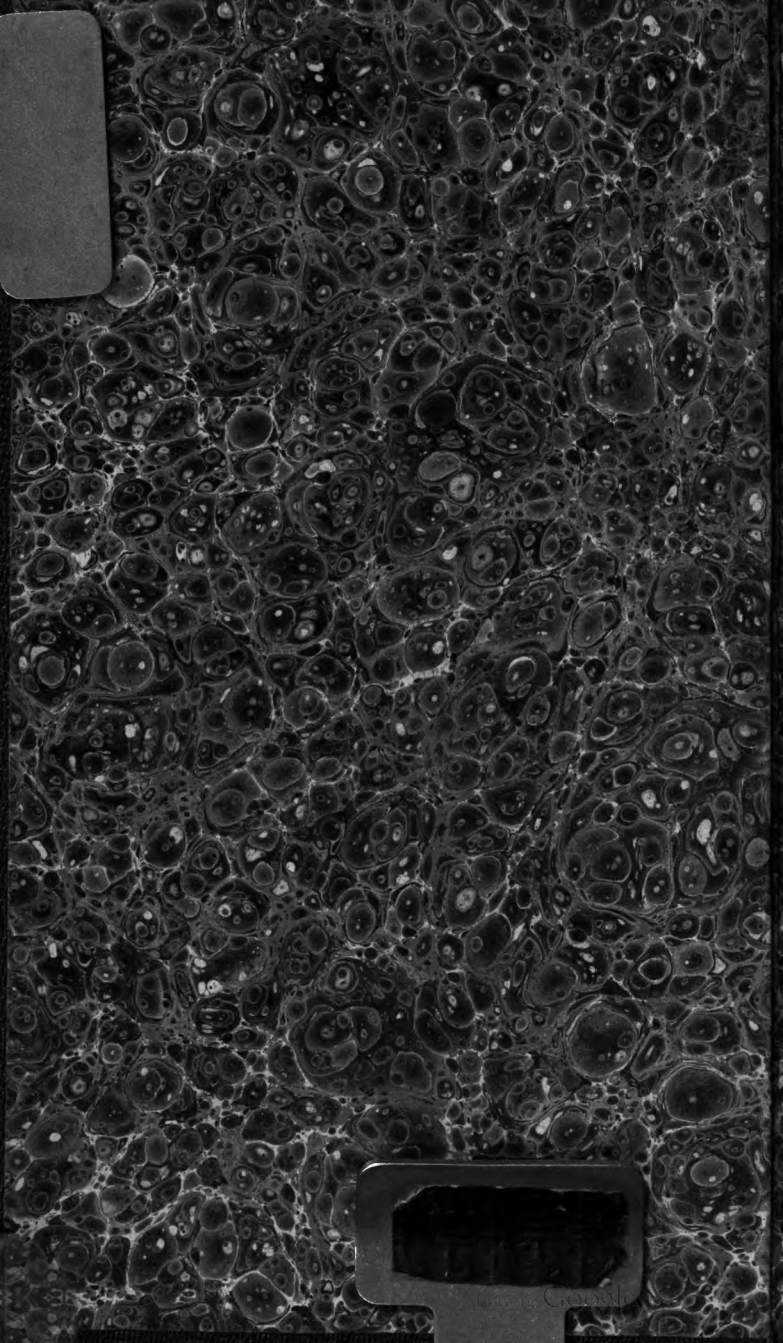

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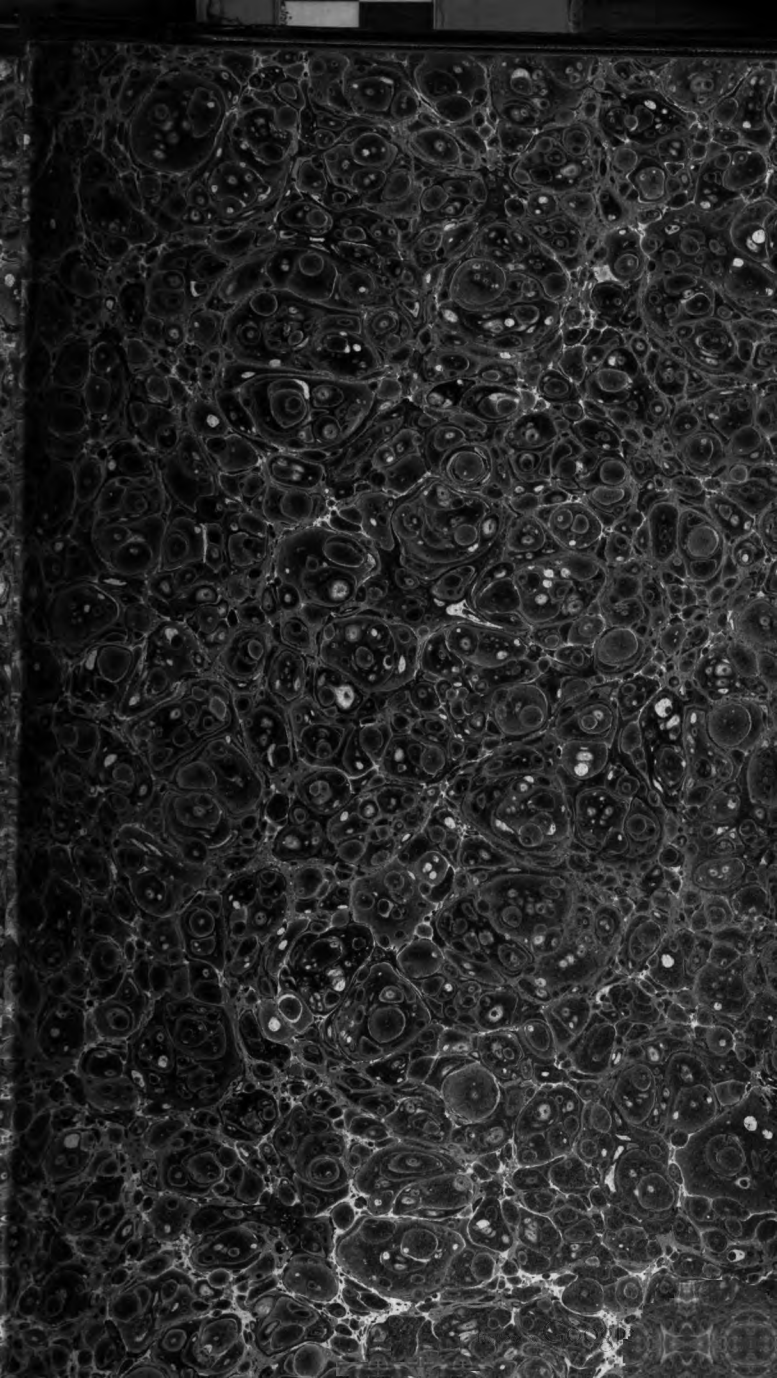
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S E R M O N S.

S E R M O N S

FOR THE

SEASONS OF ADVENT, CHRISTMAS,

AND

THE EPIPHANY.

BY

THE REV. G. R. GLEIG, M.A.,

Principal Chaplain to Her Majesty's Forces.

“Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.”—2 TIM. ii. 14.

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THE following Discourses, founded upon the Scriptures of Truth, and dealing with their subjects in the order which the Church has instructed us to follow, I offer to such as may accept them, in the humble but earnest hope, that by the great mercy of Him who, in an age long past, sent his messenger to prepare the way for the

first coming of the Redeemer, they may, at this solemn season, prove in some degree instrumental towards the attainment of an end which, in the Collect for the Third Sunday in Advent we pray from year to year, that the Lord Jesus Christ will enable the ministers and stewards of his mysteries to seek continually.

Chelsea, Nov. 1844.

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S E R M O N S.

SERMON I.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ROMANS XIII. 12.

*“ The night is far spent, the day is at hand:
let us therefore put off the works of darkness,
and let us put on the armour of
light.”*

It is not worth while to inquire very closely into the precise meaning which the Apostle intended that his Roman converts should affix to the words that have been

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introduced into the text. Whether he encouraged himself, and was unwilling to extinguish in others, the hope which then largely prevailed among the members of the infant church,—the earnest hope,—that, ere the living generation passed away, the Lord would return with power and great glory to judge the world; or whether he looked no further than to the blessed change which shall be wrought in the faithful, when that which we call death shall have laid their bodies to rest, and sent back their spirits to Him who gave them; in either case, it is impossible to read this appeal to the Romans without being convinced of the depth and fervour of the Apostle's zeal,—without catching, as it were, a ray from the flame of his inspiration; and feeling, if we can accomplish nothing more, that a

very grave question is proposed to us for discussion.

St. Paul's exhortation, as the Epistle for this morning's service has abridged it, is solemn and practical throughout. There is no allusion there to modes of thinking and of acting, which have passed away with the ages that produced them. There is no discussion of doctrines—vital, doubtless, when taken in their simplicity, yet very apt to mislead and to confuse if dwelt on too much or too minutely. His speech is of men's lives, of their every-day proceedings, of the principle on which they bear themselves in their intercourse with God, or with one another; and of the issues, here, or hereafter, or in both states of their existence, to which the adjustment of their moral natures shall inevitably lead. "Owe no man any thing, but to love

one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this,—thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly included in this saying,—thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” There is no mistaking the design of this; there is no passing beyond the line which is drawn by it. Love is the fulfilling of God’s law, and love worketh no ill to his neighbour. Wherefore he who committeth adultery, he who killeth, he who stealeth, who beareth false witness, who coveteth; yea, he who faileth in that holiest and most sublime declaration of all, and loveth not his neighbour as himself, that man, let him

frame to his own heart what excuse he may, hath broken God's law. And if his life be spent in the habitual neglect of these requirements, yea, even if in one, and only in one instance, he habitually set them at naught, there is no reliance to be placed in Scripture, there is no answer of truth in conscience when it is awakened, if he find not cause, even before he quit this earth, bitterly to deplore it.

It is not, however, to these things, important as we admit them to be, that we are invited at this season by the solemn services of our Church to apply, in an especial manner, our attention. In every page of Holy Scripture, the moral duties of life are enforced; and from day to day, as the wise man turns them over, he more and more ascertains that fact, and is guided by its influence. But this is no common

day. We have arrived at the beginning of those Advent weeks which the Church has, from time immemorial, stamped with a seal as it were of peculiar sanctity ;—as a season when Christian men are, even more than at other times, exhorted to commune with their own hearts, and in their chambers, and be still. Indeed, the very term advent, when spoken in a thinking man's ear, sounds solemnly. The word advent signifies “ coming,” —the coming or near approach of some person or some event of which the arrival shall be attended with grave consequences, and for which they who look forward to it wait anxiously. There was a time when the weeks of Advent grew into months, and years, and centuries; when generation after generation repeated the promise that had been made to the first pair in para-

dise, yet went each to its mother earth without beholding the accomplishment. That time has passed away. The long-expected deliverer has come—as a feeble infant—as a growing youth—as a man meek and gentle, yet of aspect so full of dignity, that go where he might, crowds attended on his footsteps, and his very enemies did him reverence. He has come, and is gone, though not for ever. He will return again, not as he came before, to give his life a ransom for many, but to call to their account the whole sum of human beings,—you, and me, and our fathers, and our children,—all that now live, all that have lived, all that yet shall live in time. He will come again in the clouds of heaven, with the holy angels round him, and his advent will be announced by the blast of that trumpet

which shall wake the very dead. His coming will be widely different from what it was eighteen hundred and forty-four years ago. God's messengers sang hymns of praise over him, as he lay a helpless and new-born babe in the manger; they will, when he comes again, be gathered round his throne, to offer to him their homage and to do his bidding. Our weeks of Advent are therefore hallowed and distinguished as we find them, in order that, having this great truth brought distinctly to our remembrance, we may apply ourselves with earnestness to the task of ascertaining how far we are, or are not, in a fit state to bid him welcome.

And surely if ever there was submitted to thinking men an occupation of the unspeakable importance of which they may be expected to feel the conviction, this is

that occupation. Other things that are now hid in the future, may happen or they may not. The blessings that cheer us to-day may make wings to themselves and flee away to-morrow. Our earthly cares and anxieties may be dissipated in a moment when we least expect it. Our friendships may grow cold ; our estrangements ripen into their opposites ; our hopes fulfil themselves, or scatter like the mists before the wind ; yea, and prudence, and foresight, and talent, and great care may help us, with God's blessing, to escape the evil that immediately threatens, and realize the distant good. But there are two matters connected with us which we can neither change nor set aside—death and the judgment. Death is ever before us, yet we heed it not. The bell tolls or the drum beats, each warning the healthy

in their well-furnished apartments, that all which was mortal of a fellow-creature is going to its grave. And the healthy hear the sound, and look from their windows on the procession below, and are saddened, it may be, for an instant. Yet, see how entirely the vision has faded from their memory, ere one half-hour is passed. There was music in that chamber when the coffin passed under it; it ceased for a moment, and the delicate player looked out and felt her pulse beat strangely. She turned to the mirror, and lo! her cheek was pale. Poor child, it was a natural dread that came over her then;—nothing more,—the constitutional shrinking which the living feel when they come into the presence of the dead. And she laid her hand upon her heart, and it fluttered. She stood at her window till

the procession turned the corner; the corner shut it from her gaze, and she breathed more freely. Was she sobered by all this? Alas! no. She sat her down again, not perhaps at once to her instrument, but somewhat apart, and thought. Her thoughts were gloomy, and glad was she when light steps sounded on the stairs. Her friends, her companions, are round her now, and which of them all could tell, that, but the instant before, she had been looking on a funeral and thinking of death? The man of business bends him over his ledger, and scrutinizes with eagerness the figures that are written there. They are all so many tokens of money—of money lent or borrowed,—put out at interest or hazarded in trade; and his whole soul is occupied in calculating the returns which he may reasonably expect

to derive from them. The postman's knock is at the door; his letters are handed in, and one sealed and edged with black he opens timidly. He learns that, only two days previously, the head of a house, with which his own is intimately connected, had died. "How strange! I saw him not a fortnight ago, and then his health appeared at least as robust as my own. I wonder who will now take the chief management of the concern." And so he bends his head once more over his day-book, and forgets that there is a great account unentered there, which he, equally with his business friend, must sooner or later settle. Why speak of the soldier in his pride of youth, or the hardy mariner who has played with danger in so many different shapes, that he has long ceased to take account of it? These equally labour

to persuade themselves, that to bring on a disregard of that which is inevitable, constitutes part of the training to which their professions subject them. Oh, most unwise conclusion! Oh, vain and impracticable effort! The soldier and the sailor have, like other men, immortal souls to be saved or lost, and woe be to him who has learned to forget, in any calling or position of life, that in the grave there is no repentance.

And so it is throughout: the world's business goes on continually,—whether it be the labour of toil or the toil of pleasure; the tramp of columns or the careering of ships upon the sea,—whether the whirl of a complicated machinery deafen them, or they listen night after night to the tones of soft music,—men and women are everywhere busy—busy

about things that, when attained, seldom recompense the labour of seeking them; chasing shadows that melt in their hands, and leave them more disconsolate than ere the race began. What a strange pageant is human life to him who regards it from the point to which we have now ascended. How full of inconsistencies, which appear in nothing so remarkably as in this, that all the parties to it are occupied about every conceivable matter, save that alone which is at once the most obvious and the most important.

The Apostle, in that portion of his Epistle to the Romans which has this day been read, reproves his converts, though gently, for entering even for a day within the unprofitable circle. He tells them what it is that fulfils God's law, and earnestly advises them to observe it,

pressing upon them the acceptance of so important a truth by an argument which the more thoughtful among us will alone understand. He bids them live for God in all things, "knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." To those faithful men, scorned and despised by the world,—to those earnest, anxious, and most sincere believers,—the life that was passing offered no vehement attractions; the very light of the natural sun seemed to have become dim to them. Not that they were gloomy, or morose, or unhappy in themselves. They had joys of which the world knew nothing,—the joy of worship in secret places,—the happiness that springs from those communings between the human soul and the great Author of its existence, which to the

righteous alone are granted; yea, and one with another they dwelt in amity and deep regard, each knowing that those around him were his fellow-travellers over the narrow path, that widens ever as men move forward, till it carry them to the gates of Heaven. But they *felt* what we *profess*; they knew by personal experience what we say, and say in doubt, that they were but strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, passing on to a better country. And hence it arose that, though grateful for every mercy which the Lord vouchsafed them,—though giving and receiving comfort in the intercourse which they held one with another,—life in the body seemed to them but as life in a dream,—an absence from those great realities which shall not be reached till the mortal shall have put on immortality. Moreover,

in exact proportion to the growth within them of those weaknesses and frailties to which the best of men are liable, was accounted to be, both by themselves and by the Apostle, the deepening of their darkness. Hence the exhortation this day read, to awake out of sleep; hence the repetition of a truth which had long been familiar to them, that each morning that dawned, each evening that succeeded it, each hour that the shadow marked on the plate of the dial, as the sun went further into the west, brought nearer to them that salvation for which their hands were stretched out continually. They were not such as we are; they never forgot that the seal of death was on their foreheads. The anticipation of that last event in time was present with them at all moments; yet it brought no touch of

sadness in its train. Yea, they rejoiced when those whom they loved the best were taken hence, as they termed it, to the Lord, and earnestly desired, as they stood upon their graves, to follow. Oh, happy Christians! Oh, true and faithful men! When shall we, who profess to follow in their footsteps, find grace and strength to become like them?

SERMON II.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ROMANS XIII. 12.

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore put off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”

THE words of the text were written at a time when the spirits of the faithful seem to have been universally sustained by such a perception of the relative value of things present and things to come, as is not now to be met with, except at rare intervals. They had made their choice

deliberately, and deliberately adhered to it; they had counted the cost ere they began to build, and were nowise disposed to withdraw their hands from the labour. Their portion here they had cheerfully relinquished, looking for a recompense hereafter; they desired to be absent from the body, that they might be present with the Lord, though they waited for his summons patiently. Accordingly, he to whom they were indebted for their first knowledge of the gospel wrote to them ever, even when his object was to reprove, in language which suited their case, but which seems figurative to us only, because we are unable to place ourselves in the position of the early converts. Our day was their night, our night was their dawning. They did not live so much as sleep in the world of busy men. The

ordinary occupations which engross our thoughts were to them dreams, and no more. Their life was hid in Christ, and they earnestly desired to realize it. And though it be indisputable that, among them, not less than among us, passion betrayed, and prejudice misled such as listened to their enticings, still there was righteous principle to fall back upon, every appeal to which told to the advancement of God's glory, and to the ultimate establishment of man's peace. Accordingly, St. Paul, while instructing them in the requirements of their Maker's law, and shewing them how vain must be the hopes of those who habitually despise it, urges this as the strongest inducement to a willing obedience on their part, that the time of their trial here upon earth was rapidly diminishing. "Our salvation,"

he says, "is nearer than when we (first) believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore put off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."

Now it is impossible to look round upon the crowds which meet and pass us by, without having this melancholy suspicion awakened, that the numbers of such as feel the full force of the Apostle's words are wonderfully small. Who ever dreams of regarding the life that now is as his night—his moral night, wherein sleep too often comes over him? Who ever thinks of the hour of death, either to himself or to others, except as that which shall remove him from light into darkness? We do not *feel* that our salvation is nearer than when we believed; we cannot, therefore, see that the night is wear-

ing old, yea, that the dawn is breaking. Yet so it is. Whether we desire it or not,—whether we take heed to ascertain, or chase it from our thoughts,—onwards and onwards still death is advancing towards us. Has he not struck—is he not daily striking, right and left, behind us and before? Where are our fathers, our children, our brothers, our sisters, our friends, our dear, dear companions? They are gone we know not whither; and, however reluctant we may be to admit the idea, we, in our turns, must follow. The poet says, that—

“All men think all men mortal but themselves.”

This is not true. We never think of death at all, if we can avoid it; we never willingly permit the subject to enter into our meditations; but we cannot always keep it at a

distance, and when it does come, we *know* that we are mortal. So far it is well ; and if this season of Advent have but the effect of impressing so grave a truth indelibly on our memories, not in vain shall we have been permitted once again to behold it. But this is not all concerning which the weeks of Advent warn us. The same Lord for whom the old world waited and watched as its promised Saviour, shall come again at an hour when he is least expected, to judge the quick and the dead ; and woe be to them who appear before him otherwise arrayed than in that whole armour of light of which St. Paul makes mention. Is there not something that appals us in the anticipation ? Can the boldest or the best look at it and believe without terror ?

Yet of all the employments to which

men can give themselves up, this of trembling, and nothing more—is the idlest. Your terror, though it wring you from morn till night, cannot stop the Lord's second coming. As surely as darkness follows upon sunset, as surely as the dawn gives place to the day, so surely at the season which Eternal Wisdom has determined will the Lord's throne be set in the heavens. Moreover, with a progress which is never interrupted—no, not for one instant, nor for less than an instant,—if by a narrower measure than this time can be meted—is the hour of the Lord's second arrival advancing. You are nearer to the judgment-day by one whole year now than you were when last the service for the First Sunday in Advent was read to you. You will be nearer to it, by four-and-twenty hours at this time to-

morrow, whether you still abide with us visibly in the flesh, or be summoned where our mortal vision cannot follow you. To fear, therefore, and tremble, to wring the hands, and say, "How terrible is the prospect ! how unable am I to sustain it !" is not more wise than it will be, after the sentence of eternal banishment from the Lord's presence is pronounced, to call upon the hills to hide and the mountains to cover us. You must be judged ; you cannot escape it. Fear then, but do not permit your fear to degenerate into terror. Yea, and ponder too. No light or profane word has ever passed your lips, no unholy or loose thought has ever been cherished in your minds, no unrighteous act has ever defiled, or degraded, or abused your bodies, which shall not on that day appear in evidence against you.

Nay, nor is this all: comparatively few of our sins affect ourselves alone. Our conversation, our example, our advice, our very manner, is always operating upon others for good or for evil. Shall we not be judged for this? Look at that fallen creature; she was once innocent, and holy, and pure, and fit for Heaven, till thy false tongue deceived her. What is she now? And do not deem that, because years may have passed away, and thy very thoughts have long ago ceased to concern themselves about her, that therefore she is forgotten by Him from whom no secrets are hid. There stands against thee, on her account, a charge not less weighty than the ruin of an immortal soul. Think whether there is strength in thee to shake it off, or any means of evading it. Or, possibly, the young man

owes to thee his first acquaintance with vice; his earliest taste for habits that destroy both body and soul: and though divided for half a lifetime from his teacher by many a mile of sea and land, he still remembers the lessons which were communicated to him in his youth, and continues to act upon them. Art thou blameless in the matter of his ruin? Will he not, at the day of judgment, fling it in thy teeth, that but for thee he had never become the carnal, sensual, devilish thing that he is? Or yet again, it may be that thy light, and frivolous, and profane words, thine ill-disguised contempt for the truths of Revelation, or, which is scarcely less fatal, thine ostentatious parade of respect for the ordinances of religion, considered as mere matters of decorum, has not passed unobserved by the very children

whom the Lord gave, that thou mightest train them in his nurture here, and guide them to Heaven. Think how thine agony will be aggravated a thousand-fold when sons and daughters cover thee with reproaches, proclaiming, in their despair, that to thee, their father, they stand indebted for the career of presumptuous infidelity which they ran in time, for the casting of their lot throughout eternity, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. How little do men reflect upon these things even in the moments of their deepest and most poignant remorse. Yet they are all true—true to the very letter ; for sin, like the plague-spot, confines not its baneful operations to the individual in whom it first shews itself. All who come under the influence of the sufferer catch his disease ; and for their offences, not less

than for his own, God will hold him responsible.

If the truth were not forced upon us by the experience of all time ; if our own eyes did not see it, and our own ears take it in, it would be impossible to believe that the world could be crowded with persons—with rational men and rational women—who, crediting all this, and looking forward to the hour which shall change their belief into certainty, are yet so engrossed by the business or the pleasures of the hour as to think and act in habitual disregard of all that lies beyond it. Surely it cannot be that our souls are so completely tied down to earthly things, that the pictures which, at wide intervals, we permit ourselves to draw of the day of judgment itself take their colouring from the scenes which we

may have witnessed in an earthly court of justice. We have seen, before their human judges, the guilty escape and the innocent suffer. We have heard the false witness palter with the truth, and the skilful advocate so pervert it, that the minds of the jury became darkened in the case, and their verdict set both right and equity aside. We cannot surely act so unwise a part as to imagine that, before the throne of Him who is to judge both quick and dead, scenes such as these shall be enacted. We feel, on the contrary, that they who stand at that bar will have no advocate to plead for them—will require no advocate. The witnesses for and against them will be the events of their own lives, faithfully, undisguisedly, publicly reflected before them; while the sen-

tence that dooms each to joy or to misery eternal will fall from the lips of Him whose eye is everywhere. Moreover, the very fear of disgrace which operates so powerfully with us now—the deliberate conviction at which we often arrive, that the discovery of this foul act or that base word would kill us—why is it so feeble when our thoughts are directed towards the last great assize? Do you not know that the very secrets of the heart shall then be laid bare—not before God alone, for from him they have never been concealed—but before thy kindred, thy connections, thy friends, thine acquaintances, before all with whom thy name was familiar here upon earth—before millions to whom it was never known nor heard of till it became thus coupled with infamy and crime. Yet we fancy that we

are safe, because the darkness of night is over us: yea, we send a little child away that we may sin at our ease, forgetting that God is near, and that our shame will one day be pointed at by men and angels.

Or, possibly, we console ourselves by conjuring up continually images of God's long-suffering, or of the extenuating circumstances which apply to our individual cases. It is a fatal error—it is a melancholy delusion. God's long-suffering and mercy are abundantly displayed in every stage of this our mortal being. To him we are indebted for the prolongation of our days and the innumerable opportunities that are afforded for repentance and reformation. God reproves us through his written word, by the voices of his ministers, and in the tones of our own con-

sciences, when they awake from their slumbers. God punishes, in order to humble and to save; through the sufferings, both bodily and mental, to which we are subjected. God arouses within us a sense of gratitude, which ought to soften more than punishment itself, by the countless blessings of which we are partakers; by the sudden and unlooked-for deliverances out of trouble of which we are the objects. God hides from men here the sins which will hereafter be revealed before angels, in order that our sense of his great and undeserved goodness may lead us to abandon them. Who can say that God has not been merciful to him already, far, far beyond his own deservings? Who can suppose that, so long as soul and body hold together, God will cease to be merciful? Then, what right have you to look for more? If

you persist in sinning after all this has been done; if you mock at your Father when he reproves, and are thankless and ungrateful for his blessings, with what face can you expect that, when the season of your trial is over, he will deal with you otherwise than as strict justice shall require? And then, as to the extenuating circumstances which your own partial eyes discover in your own case, what are they? Strong temptation—convenient opportunity—the ready means of concealment—the anguish of protracted resistance—the hope of bettering yourself and your family—the shame of falling back in the world. Oh! man, man, man! these excuses, these pleas, are not urged now, they will not be urged hereafter, by thee alone. There is not a creature among living men whose

memory labours with the thought of sins committed; who does not, day and night, try to cheat himself by saying, "The world could never understand the nature of my position, were it made public. But God, who knoweth all things, knows how severe has been my trial, and to him I commit my fate, nowise distrusting his mercy." Yea; and when we all meet before the throne of Christ, the very air will ring with the same wild cry. Where, then, are those peculiarities which thou wouldst fain urge in extenuation of thy guilt? Thine is but the plea of all who lived without God in the world. Can the great Judge accept it, yet preserve his own attributes of justice and truth?

It is grievous to remember that truths which are laid down in every page of Holy Writ, should, by us who read God's scrip-

tures daily, be overlooked or forgotten. We look constantly to God for mercy, yet do not perceive that his mercies are ever present with us. We profess to regard him as perfect in his justice and truth, yet put out of view the fact that he cannot be either true or just, if they who refuse to profit by his mercies while they are afforded, find no cause to regret it. He who lives ill, and dies in his sins, deceives himself if he dream of an acquittal at the day of judgment. The whole universe will then witness, it is true, the wonderful extent of its Maker's long-suffering; but the acceptance of the best of men will prove this, and the condemnation of the hardened and the daring shall not contradict it. Let us, then, ere the dawn break, put off the works of darkness. It will be too late to say

that we are weary of them, when the sun has risen, and our plight is visible to the universe. There is no repentance in the grave ; there is no pardon for the sinner who repenteth not.

SERMON III.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ROMANS xv. 4.

“Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning ; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

THE words just quoted fall upon the ear of the thinking and the believing man with a melody to which strains of music heard in darkness and amid deep solitude constitute sheer discord. They are the voices of friends who come to aid us in some moment of imminent peril ; which speak to us when we are buried in the earth,

and bid us keep a good heart, for they will yet dig down and save us ; which call aloud to hold on by that oar, or that reed, for they see our plight, and will soon deliver us ; which cheer as we present ourselves at the window, far above the street, when the flames are roaring in the flats below, and the smoke rushing and blackening round us. They speak of hope—hope towards God—hope in reference to the great day that is before us, and the solemn and strict account which shall then be taken ; and they guide us to the point whence the first faint rays which issue from that bright and blessed morning star become visible. “ Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning.” The records of God’s power, and majesty, and mercy—the annals of man’s moral and religious

history from the beginning—the tale of his waywardness, of his Maker's long-suffering—all these have been written and preserved through countless ages for our learning. Yea, and the counsel of Him whose Spirit guided the pen of the writers from generation to generation, is throughout the same that shewed itself in the first great act of creation—boundless love, goodness inexhaustible. These things were written “that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.” Oh blessed announcement! Oh joyous and most acceptable assurance! We are not forsaken by Him who created and redeemed us; we are not left without a guide to go before us through the wilderness, and direct our steps in the way that leads to life. Our season of Advent is not one of unmitigated

terror. Solemn, indeed, and grave are the thoughts which crowd upon us when we anticipate the events that are hastening on—death and the judgment. Yet in the things that were written aforetime for our learning, there is that which strengthens us to bear up against our natural fears, and through patience and the comfort which God's Scriptures communicate, we learn to hope.

And gladly would we enter at once on this fairer and brighter side of the picture, to a contemplation of which the season of the year invites us, were not the fact present in our minds, that the disposition to turn thither is already stronger, perhaps, than it ought to be in each man's individual heart; were it not made certain by the experience of a whole lifetime, that few inducements from without are needed

to draw men into soothing and consolatory dreams of the exceeding mercy of Him before whom they must one day stand. But, pleasant as the task may be of proclaiming to the repentant that a Saviour has died for them, a fatal error is committed, if we speak of pardon, even through Christ, where there is no repentance. The Scriptures are unquestionably full of comfortable assurances to such as study them aright. Let them be a guide to your feet and a lantern to your paths, and hope will soon spring up in your bosoms. But ye palter with your own peace,—ye put in frightful jeopardy both body and soul,—if ye imagine that the hearer, who is not also the doer of God's will, can be accepted. Therefore is it necessary, ere we can hope to escape from danger, to ascertain precisely where it lies; and this is to be done

only by looking more narrowly than, amid the occupations of our every-day life, we are apt to do, at the consequences of those sins in which we too much indulge, and the frightful responsibility which we incur by their commission.

Besides the account that shall be required at our hands of every soul which, through our agency or example, has been shut out from heaven ;—besides the horror that awaits us, when we see them whom we betrayed hide their faces in shame, and point to us as their betrayers ;—besides the anguish that will wring our hearts, when the profligate charges us with his ruin, and our own children, cast into outer darkness, reproach us with having hidden from them the truths of God's written word, and trained them from their infancy to despise and deride them,—there is not one hour

of temporal suffering which dates from our injustice or our heedlessness—there is not a widow's tear or an orphan's curse—there is not a poor man's complaint or a wronged man's murmur—there is not one of these things, if to us it may be fairly traced back, that will not appear in evidence against us at the great day. Men quite mistake their proper places in God's creation, if they conceive that it is of themselves alone that they are required to be careful. When years have passed over us, and the very remembrance of some dark deed is beginning to grow faint, we flatter ourselves that it is gone, and clean forgotten. We have done the widow wrong;—we have used the law's obliquities, and wrested his patrimony from the orphan. And she has gone down to her grave in sorrow, or he is far away in some distant land, toiling, we

care not how ;—while we abide at home, and are flattered and looked up to because that which ought to have made others comfortable has increased our wealth. Yea, and we are forward with our works of ostentatious charity : we subscribe to every institution that claims to work good, and proclaims its own deservings, through the press, or at public meetings ; we thrive, too, and prosper ; we are hospitable and generous ; and our children and our domestics, and our ordinary acquaintances, say that we deserve the character which the world gives us. We are in the highest degree respectable. Man, cheat, impostor ! think you that all this is hidden from God ? Has the Lord not seen the widow weep in her desolate apartment ? has God not heard the orphan's groan, in the place of his

exile, and amid the toil to which thou hast condemned him? Live on, and let thy life be to the last, what it now is, a continuous lie; but be assured that the day is coming when its exposure shall cover thee with shame.

Or, possibly we have, in the indulgence of mere youthful passion, broken in upon the peace of a family, and done it grievous wrong. Our victim may have lived to repent and be forgiven,—for God is merciful, through Christ, to the erring, when they come to him in bitterness of heart and great contrition;—and the other members of the household are, to all appearance, precisely what they would have been had we never known them, nor wrought them ill. Are we, therefore, free from the responsibility of our own bad deed? Nothing of the sort.

There are long, long months or years of anguish to come against us, when the Lord is Judge; and, though a gracious God has at length wiped the tears from the mourners' faces, were not these tears wrung from them through us? God forbid that there should be no hope of pardon for such as, by their follies or their vices, have occasioned in former years grief to others. Were the Lord thus extreme to mark what has been done amiss, who indeed could abide it? Yet, this much is certain—that he who conceives that his score is cleared off because his own thoughts are light in reference to some matter through which his fellow-creatures have suffered;—grievously, yea, fatally, misleads himself. Prayer, penitence, remorse, will, through the blood that was shed, move the Most High to

pardon. But there can be no pardon for him who increases both the amount and enormity of his transgressions by treating them and their bitter consequences, however agonizing to others, as subjects of ridicule or of complacency.

Again, he takes a very narrow view of his own moral responsibility, and altogether deceives himself in regard to the issues of the day of judgment, who imagines that, when the period of the second advent has come, men shall be arraigned only for the great and flagrant crimes of which, in their state of trial, they may have been guilty. Each station in life, each place in society, brings its duties, not less than its privileges, along with it; and woe be to him against whom the accusation shall be brought home, that, while claiming the latter, he left the former unperformed.

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Genius, talent, rank, wealth—all these are God's loans to man : they are meted out as the nobleman in the parable meted out, ere he went upon his journey, portions to his servants ; and the Lord, when he returns, will require from each a strict and stern account of the uses to which his own has been applied. The poet who prostitutes to unholy purposes the rare gift of genius with which his Maker has endowed him, will mourn when the victims of his perverted taste repeat his rhymes before the assembled universe, and say, " In these we learned to blaspheme." The man of talent who works out his schemes successfully may win such fame as the world can award ; but if he give not the glory where alone it is due, by joining worship to research, and devotion to discovery, the very powers with which for a season he

was intrusted will, at the last assize, tell against him. So, also, with the noble—so, also, with the rich. If the former set not to the classes beneath him an example of honour, truth, sobriety, purity, religion—far more, if in all these respects he be found wanting—so as to poison the stream at its very fountain-head—the rank which lifted him here above his fellow-worms of the earth will sink him hereafter below them; he will envy, when they stand together before God's throne, the meanest of the very throng whom his influence has corrupted. And for the rich, what shall we say? Look round you and see—spread out one of the daily prints, and read how want and misery—and their invariable attendant, crime—are devastating the land; and then judge for yourselves what greeting the Lord will give to such

as shall appear before him laden with the heavy guilt that appertains to a knowledge of the existence of these evils; and who, having the means to remove or diminish them, have not made one steady and enduring effort to do so. Here among your fellow-men, who honour not you but your wealth, you can frame a thousand excuses, which none will venture to combat. You can say that you do enough, because to this public institution, or to that, you pay in yearly your wretched piece of gold. But will the common Father of all accept this plea, knowing as he does the extent of your means, and the sordid care with which, from your abundance, you distribute to such as are in need? Believe it not for a moment. "I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave

me no drink; I was homeless, and ye housed me not; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not. Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." The rich know not the tremendous responsibility that attaches to the wealth which they either squander or amass. They will not think, they will not inquire, they will not try, whether, even here, the blessings of the poor made happy through their means are not the most precious boons that God himself can give them. And yet His eye beholds it all—the glittering equipages, the luxurious apartments, the gorgeous feasts, that stand side by side, in this favoured England—in this our great capital—with squalor and misery and destitution, that defy human language to

describe them. Shall not the wealthy answer for this when they appear before the judgment-seat of Christ? How will they be able to abide the rebuke of their Saviour, when he lays this great and crying sin to their charge? Nor must we stop even here.

God has laid upon the poor the burden of suffering, and the gospel of Christ requires that they take their sufferings patiently. They are much to blame if they fail in this particular, and need not hope to escape condemnation, should the distresses of the moment hurry them into crime. Yet, in the guilt of their crimes, the heartless and the grasping among the wealthy will surely share. Had there been but a little more of generosity and right-feeling in the world; had there been a more brotherly tie between one

man and another; had the haunts of poverty been sought out, the dwelling-places of ignorance visited in a kindly spirit; the hungry fed, the naked clothed, the sick and the miserable comforted,—had all this been done—not through the compulsion of man's law, but by the working of God's Holy Spirit in the bosoms of such as possessed abundantly and to spare,—not only might these degraded creatures have been kept back from the offences with which they now stand charged; but everywhere the disposition to work good rather than evil to their neighbours would have been fostered and matured among men. So true it is that not to be active in God's service involves even the indolent, though they see it not, in positive sin; for the vices of one class are often as easily

traced back to the heartlessness of another, as the shadows of evening take their rise from the sinking of the sun towards the west.

The truths which have just been stated—for grave and solemn truths they are—may be chased away or held at naught while we are in health and in strength; but the hour is coming fast when they will force themselves upon us. The dying man can hardly deceive himself. He may turn his closing eye with eagerness upon this good act or upon that, which he has done, and try to persuade himself that these occupy as prominent a place in the Lord's mind as in his own. But he will find that here his self-love fails him. "I did that truly; but what proportion does it bear to the countless opportunities which were presented to me through life,

only that I might turn away from them? My talent has not been used aright; how am I to meet the Lord, and to render in my account?" The question is a fearful one, which the Lord alone can answer, and which the Lord *will* answer when the fitting moment comes, so that the whole universe shall understand him. Meanwhile, be it our parts not to waste the days which are still our own. That which has come to others must in like manner come to us; and the words of the text encourage us to look forward to it, because they speak of hope. God grant that the promise shall be realized. God give us the desire to look for its accomplishment, by the process wherein alone we are assured of success.

SERMON IV.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ROMANS xv. 4.

“Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

IF the sentence just repeated had the effect of communicating one ray of solid comfort to the early converts, its power to sustain us, to console, to encourage, and carry us forward in the Christian warfare which is set before us, ought to be, and with every sincere believer in the Lord

Jesus, undeniably is, a thousand-fold greater. Whatsoever things in St. Paul's day had been written aforetime, were contained in the volume of the Old Testament alone. As yet the records of the Redeemer's earthly career were not committed to paper. By oral tradition exclusively ;—by the preaching from place to place of the holy men who had been the Lord's companions while he walked in the flesh, and had seen his death, and held converse with him after his resurrection,—were the great saving truths of the gospel spread abroad ; and all who received them received them on the faith of that testimony which the Spirit of God bore to the truth of the Apostle's declarations. Now the things that were written aforetime embody for us, not alone the narrative of man's religious history from the beginning, but the

tale of Christ's birth, life, conversation, teaching; of his betrayal, his death, his resurrection and ascension, wherein the volume of prophecy has, in a great degree, found its accomplishment, and God's mighty scheme for the recovery of fallen man been completed. Wherefore, with a two-fold extent of interest, with a marvellously increased assurance that in our patience, and through the comfort which Scripture gives, hope is to be found, we come to their perusal. And if the result be that we rise from this occupation neither better nor happier, nor more trusting than we were before, then we may rest assured that there is something in our own hearts which we shall do well to find out, that we may cast it from us. What is it that an attentive study of the Scriptures makes plain to us? Wherein consist the nature and the

object of that hope of which the Apostle, in my text, makes mention?

The Scriptures are not read in a becoming frame of mind, if they fail to satisfy even the guilty, that the mercies of God are visible in all his works, and nowhere more conspicuously so than in his dealings with the wicked. If there were no chance of pardon, no hope of acceptance, no prospect for the fallen, except an eternal severance from the presence of the Lord, the words of promise with which the Bible is crowded never would have found admission there. Yea, the very judgments denounced against a continuance in sin; the very assurance that there is a day appointed when all secrets, even those of the heart itself, shall be laid bare, stand on record for the purpose of awakening us who read to a sense of the

true value of our condition, both as we are now, and as we shall be hereafter. The Scriptures of God do for our polluted souls what the skilful leech tries to effect for our diseased bodies. So far from condemning us at once and for ever, they bring home to our understandings the nature of the malady under which we lie, and prescribe the means by a steady adherence to which we not only may, but shall, succeed in shaking it aside. Look at that bloated and miserable man, how he labours for breath—how swollen he is. He has brought himself to this by mere self-indulgence; and now the habit is so confirmed in him that he dares not think of laying it aside. He sends, or perhaps his wife or children send, for some one skilled in the art of healing, and the sick man looks up into the stranger's face, not with-

out terror. He is questioned concerning his condition, the state of his feelings, and the habits of his life; he answers falteringly. He cannot bring himself to tell the truth. He knows within his own heart what it is that has brought him to this; yet he would fain deceive, not the physician only, but himself. He admits that he is very ill. There is a weight on his chest which threatens to destroy him; his sleep is heavy and broken; he is a weary burden to himself; but, indeed, he cannot account for the symptoms, because his life has been a regular one, and he has always taken the greatest care to avoid coming in contact with infection. The physician sees at once with whom he has to deal. He could not please his patient more than by prescribing some medicine, yet permitting him to go on in his accus-

tomed mode of living. But the physician knows that, without a complete change in this latter respect, there can be no recovery for the invalid. How is he to act? To gratify the wretched man by confirming the delusion under which it is evident that he labours, and leaving him to die in extreme suffering, after, it may be, a brief interval or two of comparative ease? Surely not. The wise physician tells the dying man what it is that has brought him to this plight; and adds the solemn declaration that, unless he consent to a total change of diet, human skill can do nothing for him. Moreover, the good physician never pretends to hide from his patient that the task thus imposed is an arduous one. He will have great positive suffering to undergo—many cravings to resist—much apparent weakness to contend

against, and frequent dejection of spirits, ere health comes back. But there is no middle course to be pursued. If he obey the physician's instructions, and God give a blessing to the means, he may yet become both a happy and a useful member of society. If he neglect them, his fate is sealed. Will the sick man thus instructed deserve the smallest pity if he keep to his old habits and they destroy him? Will not he who is wise and considerate find hope, even amid his sufferings, when his own heart tells him that he is following the course which has in mercy been prescribed? Now, look to God's Scriptures, which were written aforetime for our learning, and see whether the most degraded and sinful among all who are at this moment present in the flesh, may not, through patience and the comfort of their perusal, find hope.

You desire to save your soul. You are not prepared to sit down and deliberately barter away eternity for time. You believe—you cannot but believe—that the Lord who came once, and is gone for a season, will come again. You know that when the last trumpet sounds, the dead, not less than the quick, shall hear it ; and that whether we commit your body to the dust, or that the depths of the ocean receive it, in your flesh you shall yet see God. You are satisfied also, that from Him who shall then call you before him, you have never, since the hour of your birth, kept one solitary secret. God has been about your bed and about your path, ever since your eyes first opened to the light, and has read the very thoughts of your heart before you embodied them in words. There is every thing to appal and alarm the bravest and

the best in this conviction ; yet it is here, —in my bosom and in yours,—and we cannot drive it from us. Moreover you know that the same eye which has followed you in the years that are past, follows you still, and will continue to follow till you die. Every loose thought, every base or dishonest action, every profane or blasphemous word, is read, and seen, and heard, by him continually. Yea, and the consequences of your habits as they affect others : your heartlessness and your selfishness ; your abuse of the talent with which the universal Father has intrusted you ; your indolence in his service ; your indifference to the wants of the poor ; your worthless excuses as often as by God's ministers ye are reminded that more, much more, is expected at your hands ; all these things are as open to the

knowledge of the Most High, as if already the veil which hides from you the sensible presence of the Redeemer were withdrawn. Your own conscience tells you this, and the Scriptures, in repeating the statement, only confirm a truth which was known to you already. Behold, then, the sort of plight into which you are fallen. If memory bring not back a dark record of deadly sins committed, is it not charged with recollections of a thousand duties neglected? The Lord has said, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Where is your self-denial?—where your bearing of the cross? Why, your life has been that of the mere man of the world throughout. We charge you not with any gross outrage upon decency—far from it. The restraints of society

have been upon you for many years. So much, at least, of the spirit of the gospel has wrought with you, that in no instance is it possible to convict you of going in opposition to the more obvious will of the Redeemer. But what cross have you ever borne? what self-denial practised purely for the Lord's sake? Can you recall to mind a solitary instance of this?—a single robe left unpurchased, that you might give the worth of it to the desolate and the needy?—a single meal curtailed of its superabundant luxuries, that the worth of it might advance the Lord's kingdom upon earth? Are you not living for the world, and for the world alone; striving to get forward,—not in the hope that, from some new point ye may be better able than you are now to do your Master's service,—but simply that your own ambition may be

gratified, even if it look no higher than to the mixing more than you have yet done with the great and titled of the land? What self-deceivers we are. We read of the strait gate and the narrow path, and we believe that we are treading the one, and striving to reach the other, because we abstain from the commission of offences to which we are not, in point of fact, tempted. Is it any cross to you that you are well thought of by your fellow-men? and do you not know that the loss of character which invariably follows the commission of certain sins would deprive you of this? What is it that keeps you honest, chaste, sober, just?—the fear of God, the love of Christ? No! you could not live under the infamy which would overtake you, were a charge of dishonesty, unchastity, intemperance, false-

hood, brought home to you. Therefore, the path which you tread is not narrow ; it is a pleasant path ; for it insures to you, as you go forward, the kindly greetings of thousands ; yet, *there stands* the Lord's injunction,—plain, clear, of an importance not to be mistaken,—applying to all ages, to all states of society, to all conditions of men, and to none more distinctly than to ours, who, by God's great mercy, have fallen upon times of decency, at least, if not of deep religious principle ; what have you done to act up to it ? Nothing !

Now the Scriptures, which were written aforetime for our learning, and from which, in our patience, the Apostle says, we may derive at once comfort and hope, tell us that continuance in these habits of constant self-indulgence will prove fatal to us. If we live only for this world, it

is idle to expect that we can obtain any portion in the kingdom of God and of Christ. This is a hard saying, doubtless; yea, it sounds harsh and cruel in the ear of him who listens to it for the first time; but so was the declaration of the wise and good physician who stood over the trembling wretch, and bade him deny himself and live, or go on in his own way and perish. Did the sick man, therefore, discredit what was told him?—did he charge his physician with acting cruelly by him? He did not; nor will you lay this blame on the Scriptures of God, so soon as God, of his infinite mercy, shall have given you grace to read them aright. There is hope in every sentence which enjoins fear, trembling, humility, self-denial, faith. There is hope in the words which invite to a strict self-examina-

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tion, which awaken remorse, which shew how miserably we have heretofore deceived ourselves. Certain it is that, without all these things, he who has once sinned can never be forgiven; and surely the book which shews how pardon and peace are to be won, is full of comfort, even to the most degraded.

But while we thus make mention both of comfort and of hope, let us be very careful that we do not mislead either ourselves or others. There is little comfort for the sinner on his first awakening to the consciousness of his own melancholy plight. Not to speak of that worm which lies in his heart, and gnaws unceasingly;—not to dwell upon the frightful images that rise up before him, while he kneels and says, with hands clenched together, “It is done—it cannot be undone—it is past, and

beyond my means of recall ;"—not to draw for you a picture of the long and sleepless nights passed in vain regrets, in hopeless, aimless repinings ;—not to describe the visions that pass through the troubled brain wherein this scene or that in the sad drama is altered—woe ! woe ! how idly ;—not to echo back the cry, the wild cry, that often escapes him, " Oh ! if I had but done so and so, how different would my position at this moment have been ;"—not to dwell upon these obvious causes of agony—of agony so hideous, that we are justified in regarding it as a mere foretaste of the horrors that are to come ;—he who for long years has disregarded or missed to find the way of his Redeemer, must count upon many struggles yet, in the future, ere his soul shall attain to rest. Habits long established, whether of posi-

tive vice, or of mere self-indulgence, are not overcome without a terrible effort ; and the enticements to give way are often so urgent and so numerous, that to hold out against them seems all but impossible. But hold out we must. We are like the sick man and his dietary. Each slip that we make backwards prepares for us both immediate suffering and the necessity of increased endurance in the time that is to come ; and if they occur often, not all the suffering which we have undergone, nor all the anxiety we have endured, will avail any thing. The Scriptures are, indeed, full of hope, even to the chief of sinners, provided he repent, and become a new creature in Christ Jesus : much more will they be found to carry consolation into the breasts of those whose sins may have originated as much, perhaps, in the want

of thought, as from any evil inclinations. But the hope which they light up will be changed into fruition in both cases, only so far as they become to such as read them a guide of life. Therefore let no man deceive himself; nor let any word which falls from another mislead him. When the second advent is come, no hill will hide either yourselves, or the moral and religious state of your souls, from Him before whose judgment-seat you are appointed to stand. Study, therefore, carefully, and use aright the things that were written aforetime for your learning; for thus, and only thus, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, ye will have hope.

SERMON V.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

1 CORINTHIANS IV. 5.

“Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.”

It is impossible to read the portions of Scripture which enter into the various services for the Sundays in Advent, without being struck with the exceeding care which the Church has taken, that, of the most important of all the truths that are

revealed in God's Holy Word, we should never, from the beginning to the end of this season, become forgetful. Everywhere, in the Epistles, in the Gospels, yea, in the very Collects themselves, reference, more or less direct, is made to the Lord's second coming. How striking, how beautiful are the terms of that prayer wherein, but a few minutes ago, we opened out our hearts to the throne of mercy :—" Oh, Lord Jesus Christ ! who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee, grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy

Spirit, ever one God, world without end.” Who, in words like these, can have lifted up his soul to Heaven, believing, yea, even if he tremble while he believes, that the Lord hears him, without receiving an assurance, strong beyond the influence of the world to shake it, that, come that day soon or late,—be it in our time or in the times of our remote posterity,—nothing can hide us, or the deepest secrets of our hearts, from Him who, as he is continually present with us now, so he shall by-and-by call us to the judgment? Who, moreover, can doubt, that now, even more earnestly than at other seasons, the ministers and stewards of the Lord’s mysteries are, by their Divine Master, expected and required to bring this great truth home to the bosoms of the Lord’s people? Have we not prayed that they may find grace

and strength so to express themselves, that the hearts of the disobedient may be turned to the wisdom of the just? And is it not our assigned motive for so petitioning, that, “at the Lord’s second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in his sight?” Moreover, not the least remarkable incident among the many which enter this day into our devotional exercises is this,—that the prayer which we have uttered is, like the Scripture from which it is derived, destined to lose its force only when the race of men, for whose use it has been compiled, shall have become extinct. The prayer in question is of an antiquity so remote that we cannot trace it back to its first beginnings. We find it in the liturgies of the earliest Christians—among the devotions of the Fathers—in the holy exercises of

the Church of Rome, as well during the days of her comparative purity as amid her decline. We have received it into our Book of Common Prayer, with many a rich gem besides, culled from this quarter and from that, as the spirit of true devotion guided our forefathers to look for them. And as long as the English language endures, and the service of our pure and Apostolic Church shall survive, so long will our children and our children's children continue regularly, as this Lord's Day comes round, in the very same words, and in the same sense of their solemnity and grave importance, to address the throne of grace. Not, therefore, to us alone, nor to the generation into which we have fallen, does the last and most touching clause in this beautiful prayer exclusively apply. We supplicate the Lord, that, be his

second coming when it may, the dead, not less than the quick, shall be prepared to greet him ; and we look, as we are justified in doing, to the ministers and stewards of his mysteries, that they will, both now and in all time coming, labour with diligence, the Holy Spirit working with them, to bring about so glorious a consummation. What account, then, shall he give at the great day, of his stewardship, who has been careless or indifferent in the work of his calling ; either slurring over the strictness of the account which shall from each particular man be exacted, or shrinking from a consideration of the subject altogether, lest haply he might disturb, or distress, or, it may be, offend, such of the Lord's people as waited on his ministry ? “ Let a man so account of us,” says St. Paul, “ as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of

the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

The ministers and stewards of the mysteries of God have no more solemn task committed to them than to convince the world, as far as their voices shall extend through it, of the reality of this judgment of which we are speaking. To be assured of its coming, to enter into, and appreciate aright, the nature of the realities that shall attend it,—to feel that there is not a day in his life which renders him not either better or worse prepared to abide the issue,—to accomplish all this is, indeed, to work out the great work which the Lord has assigned to the Christian for performance: and a happy man is he whose conscience tells him that he has achieved, or is labouring to achieve

it. For, solemn and grand as the gathering shall be, there is nothing in the anticipation of it which ought to affect the righteous with terror. Doubtless, the best of living men perceives how far short he comes of perfection. His notions of what the life of the believer ought to be are so exalted, yet so just, that every night, ere he spread his limbs to rest, he prays that God, for the Saviour's sake, will pardon the thousand sins and imperfections which, even in the course of the day that is past, have come between him and the fulfilment of his wishes. And never can he trust himself to the common business of the world, never can he go forth to meet and to pass through the contaminations which will surely beset him, while holding converse with his fellow-men, till he shall have commended him-

self with humility and reverence to the Lord's sustaining care, and laboured to array his spirit, soul, and body in the whole armour of God, as St. Paul has described it. Still the righteous man knows that his natural infirmities are open to the Being who made him what he is, and that no more will ever be expected at his hands than strength enough has been afforded to accomplish. And in this thought he finds great comfort. At the same time, let no false interpretation be put upon these words. The righteous man never casts about for excuses to be urged, should his faith fail, and deadly sin gain the mastery. He is alive, on the contrary, to the fact that trials which end in such melancholy results are ever of our own seeking; that where we feel ourselves to be weak, there

we are mad if we linger ; that temptations which are too strong to be met and overcome, may, in every situation and every case, be avoided. Are you conscious of some unholy feelings,—some wish, the accomplishment of which would plunge you, and perhaps another, in guilt and in misery ? Master it if you can ; yea, fight against it with prayer, and watching, and fasting. Be sincere in this, and God will in all probability enable you, through his grace, to prevail. But if not, if it be his pleasure to continue your trial, there is yet one course open to you. Avoid altogether the companionship of those who, by their very gentleness ;—by the many amiable qualities that appertain to and adorn them,—are, however unconsciously, undermining your peace and their own. There will be great suffering in this, great

need of vigilance, many and heavy demands upon your self-denial and endurance; but remember how much there is at stake. You are bearing the Lord's cross now. You are treading the narrow and thorny path that leads to life eternal; you are guiding another, and that other every way worthy of such guidance, towards the same strait gate, behind which lies heaven. Or habits of intemperance may be so settled with you, that you cannot trust yourself to taste God's bounty without abusing it. Then taste not at all; it is better to go into life halt or maimed, than, having two hands and two feet, to be cast into hell-fire. Or your principle of integrity may be so insecurely settled, that money never passes through your hands without the unbidden wish arising that you could appro-

priate at least a portion of it to your own uses, and escape detection. Flee from the snare that besets you, ere it be too late; give up your employment—go and beg or sweep the streets—do any thing rather than permit one deed of dishonour to cast its shadow over your soul. The instances of men who, at one period in their career, would have shrunk from the bare contemplation of such wrong, but whom a fatal tampering with themselves has led on from step to step till their names became a by-word on earth, and a blank in the book of life, are innumerable. You are without excuse if you outrage integrity in ever so slight a degree; and you will find by-and-by, after the excitement of the moment is over, that your sin has brought its own punishment along with it. What further

peace or joy can there be for him who feels that he has forfeited all claim to God's love, and to self-respect? It is not, therefore, in regard to these and other great sins resembling them, that the faithful servant of the Most High leans upon his Lord's mercies, and fears comparatively little. Neither would it be easy to explain in words the sort of wanderings from the right way, which, while we commit them, leave no such scar behind as that the Saviour's robe cannot hide them, even now. For words are feeble things, liable to much misconstruction, and the human heart is deceitful, and too prone to speak peace when there is no peace. And therefore to condescend upon specific backslidings, be they of temper, or of giddiness, or of profanity, or of lack of thought, is, in a countless majority of

instances, to suggest excuses where no excuse can be admitted. Our Pattern is so pure, so perfect, so entirely raised above the reach of the exhalations which human passion and human prejudice put forth, that to keep Him ever before us, yet to make allowances for any—the very least—deviation from right in ourselves, is impossible. Still, knowing all this, and feeling it too, the believer is at the same time alive to the fact, that the Son of God came into the world to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. What a thought is this—yea, how full of comfort; and when coupled with the Apostle's declaration, that this good Physician of the soul, this gentle and most kind revealer of his Father's will, "gave his life a ransom for our sins; and not for *ours* only, but for the sins of the whole

world," how is it possible for the honest heart, in which the seed of faith has been sown, and struck root, not to lift up itself in hope to heaven? The Christian man finds that a thousand petty temptations assail him, of which the world knows nothing. He is jarred, irritated, disappointed, afflicted. The very weaknesses of the body tell upon the soul, and there are moments when the darkness of night seems to gather over him. Does he treat these frailties lightly? By no means. He is troubled by them; he is humiliated; he remembers them all in his morning and evening prayers, and struggles to gain the mastery over them. Nevertheless, he is not afraid but that the Lord, in his own good time, will give him the victory; and this high trust it is which enables him to persevere. For

there is the knowledge continually present with him, that God placed him here in order that, by an unwearied exercise of self-control, he may humble his proud spirit, and render it meet to be partaker of that happier state of existence for which a wise and benevolent Creator has designed it. With him, therefore, these lets and hindrances are like the physical obstacles which obstruct the soldier in his onward march; the bogs, the morasses, the broken ground, the tangled thicket, to force his way through which is no light task to any man, but before which the good soldier succumbs never. Wherefore, though the flesh may creep upon the breast of the holiest when the great and terrible day of the Lord is seriously anticipated, there must be something grievously amiss in the heart of him

who dreads its coming to such an extent as that he will never trust himself to sit down in earnest and anticipate the certainty of its arrival. For the good man has not for many a long year ceased to bear the fact in his remembrance, and now hopes, conscious of his own unworthiness though he be, that, through the merits of the Redeemer, he may meet it with gladness.

But what of the words of the text? We have been advocating as yet the strictest self-examination, the sternest and most inflexible scrutiny into the human heart, whereas the Apostle warns us to judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come and bring the hidden things of darkness to light. It were to outrage either the reason or the principles of Christian men to suppose that they have

ever applied these expressions to the manner in which each individual is expected to deal with himself. It is not of our own proceedings, nor yet of the motives in which they originate, that we are forbidden to judge; for in truth, the secrets which we may keep from the world are open, wherever we go, to God's eye and to our own. But the Apostle applies his injunction to every effort on our parts to determine concerning the wisdom or the justice of God's dealings with his creatures; yea, and to the estimates which we form of the moral and religious state of our fellow-men with whom we come in contact. Judge not for thy Creator, how he might have better adjusted either thine own condition here among the dwellers upon the earth, or the conditions of thy neighbours; and be very

careful to deal tenderly with the reputations of those whose actual circumstances can be known to thee most imperfectly; with the strength and urgency of the temptations that beset whose path thou art wholly unacquainted. Leave the determination of both these points to the great day; and let it be the business of thy life, while yet time and opportunity are granted, so to balance and adjust thine own account, that thou shalt have no occasion either to blush or to tremble when it is given in.

SERMON VI.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

1 CORINTHIANS iv. 5.

“ Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.”

THERE is, to the perceptions of the unregenerate man, so much of incongruity in the state of the living and the breathing world, as it is spread out before him, that, let him deal with the subject as he may, he cannot arrive at any satisfactory

conclusions regarding it. In physical nature all things are manifestly directed by a law of order, which never varies. The day and the night succeed one another, each working out, with unfailing exactitude, its appointed and most beneficent purpose. The seasons take their rounds, clothing the earth with verdure, that it may spring up, ripen, wither, and in due time pass away. The rain falls, to awaken the springs on the hill sides, and send them down into the valleys; that they become lakes and rivers, fertilizing the earth in their course, and finally losing themselves in the mighty ocean. Measured and steady as the sentinel's tread is the progress of the hours; whether a hundred bells toll, to greet them as they pass, or they make themselves felt in their coming and going, only by the

shadows which they lead on or chase away. Yea, and among the inferior animals, there is at least regularity, and a comparative freedom from suffering; for the instincts that guide them are all perfect in their degree, while decay and death itself come upon them gently. But with man the case is different. Never standing still, continually advancing or falling back in intelligence and civilization, and acquaintance with the arts that elevate and improve, he is, wherever we find him, the sport of a thousand cross accidents; —the sufferer by his own imprudence, the disturber of his own peace. How is the circumstance to be accounted for? That he is the foremost of God's works here upon earth is demonstrated by the fact, that he exercises dominion over all the rest. Not the vegetable and mine-

ral kingdoms alone obey him, but the brutes are his servants, and the very elements do his bidding. Yet look at him in his body, in his mind, in his condition as an individual, in his place as a member of society, and say what end you find to his sorrows and perplexities. Doubtless the enjoyments of which he is susceptible far surpass those of the living creatures whom he wields at his will. He is gifted with affections, the indulgence of which, in proportion to their purity and their strength, makes him glad. His highest pleasures are those of the mind ; he is continually diving into some deep mystery or another, and the discoveries which he makes, however imperfect they may be, lift him out of himself. His heart rejoices as often as the opportunity is afforded him of relieving distress or conferring

benefits upon others. And of all these sources of happiness, creatures not endowed with the faculties which God has given to him know nothing. But what then? These very faculties are the roots and causes of all the moral, yea, and much of the physical, suffering which we see around us. The poorest, the meanest, the most degraded of your race came into the world with the seeds sown, both in his head and heart, of the same feelings, thoughts, and tastes that belong to you. There is not a monster in the human form so depraved,—there is not a spirit clothed upon with the rags of mortality so fallen,—but that it might have become, had circumstances favoured it, in every respect such as you are now. So, at least, in ordinary conversation, we express ourselves; and then we go on to wonder

how that Providence, of the wisdom and benevolence of which so much is said, should have permitted the circumstances to fail. We are wrong in all this; and, to a certain extent at least, our own powers, feeble though they be, enable us, when we put them forth, to ascertain wherein the error lies. In ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, men's present sufferings, whether they be of the body or of the mind, may be traced back to their own imprudence, or the imprudence of their forefathers. The vices of parents generally shew themselves in the feeble constitutions of their children; the improvidence of the head of a family involves all its members in distress. At the same time, here our vision ends,—all beyond is darkness. We often find the good in deep affliction—the wicked joyous, and treated

with the outward show of respect ; having no power of accounting for either contingency. The former hides in some dull, dark chamber, listening day and night to the cries of his starving family ; the latter sweeps by that wretched hovel in his chariot, and smiles, and talks loud, either ignorant of the anguish that harbours there, or altogether indifferent to it. These are startling spectacles to meet the eye of one who has been taught from his youth up, by a process which is of common occurrence among us, only that a good and wise Creator governs the universe ;—and is willing to believe it. But the Christian will look farther. The Scriptures, which were written aforetime for his learning, tell him, that the destinies of men are not cast here—once and for ever. He has read of a world beyond

this, yea, of two worlds—of two places prepared by the same gracious hand which moulded this earth, and assigned their conditions to its inhabitants; and he knows how to connect the present with the future as surely as others connect the past with the present. The Apostle's maxim is ever present with him:—"Judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness." There may be causes for the anomalies which startle us wherever we go—too much hidden for mortal eye to ascertain; or, if there be not, the Christian man is content with those which the Word of God has made manifest to him. We are here in our state of preparation; we have each his moral discipline to go through. One is tried by one process, another by another; and according

as each comes forth purified from the ordeal will be the great recompense and reward which the Lord at that day shall assign to him. Now it is very easy to say—perhaps to believe—this in reference to others. Indeed, the words are ever on our lips, especially when we become witnesses of what we believe to be unmerited suffering, and try to reconcile the mourner to his lot. But for ourselves to learn the lesson is a harder task. Is this wise in us? Surely not. He who murmurs at the destiny which has been cast for him, judges his Creator; he thinks that he himself could have ordered matters more wisely. Let him chase this idle notion from his mind. Had things gone otherwise with him,—had fortune favoured him, and his hopes and wishes all been realized,—who can tell whether

the salvation of his soul might not have paid the price? At the same time, God, who made us what we are, and has furnished our minds with vigour, and our frames with strength, did not bestow his blessings upon us without a purpose. It is not only innocent, but laudable, in his sight, to labour for the removal of difficulties, yea, for the permanent improvement of our own social condition. And if he bless our efforts with success, we shall know the better how to use and to enjoy the good, from the contrast which it offers to the evil from which we have escaped. But in all cases,—whether of suffering or of its opposite,—whether we look abroad upon the circumstances and conditions of others, or find enough at home wherewith to occupy our thoughts,—we shall do both wisely and well, if we

learn to feel,—as well as to say,—that all is for the best. Let but a few years pass, and what will it concern us how we fared in time? yet the passage of these very years may determine where our lot shall be cast throughout eternity.

Again, in the opinions which we form concerning others, whether we deal with their moral conduct in society, or with the views of men and things which they cherish and express, it will be a righteous, yea, and a prudent measure too, to keep the Apostle's maxim ever before us. We have no right to judge—no right certainly to condemn—except on such evidence as would satisfy a legally constituted tribunal. We may observe in the bearing of our acquaintances much that we could desire to see altered. There may be a levity of manner which is discordant

with our notions of things ; there may be an eagerness after amusements of which we have no experience ; there may be sternness, coldness, indifference, caprice. We should love the individuals more, were these unfortunate peculiarities not appended to them ; but let us not blame them severely. Manner, and the habits of men's every-day behaviour, are often the mere results of constitution or of education. Judge not such things too harshly, or if you do, extend not this harsh judgment to the individuals that are distinguished by them. If, indeed, vice be brought home to any one, it were worse than idle in us not to acknowledge it ; but ever think the best till the worst be forced upon you. There is no living man so upright but that the tongue of envy or of malice may reach him. Give

you no encouragement to so base a member, by either suffering your own judgment to be swayed by it, or by spreading its calumnies wider. And as to men's views on subjects which are to the full as interesting to them as to yourself, be cautious, if you will, to distinguish the points wherein they err; but be equally so not to attribute to them unworthy motives. Even on the most important of all subjects—that of religion—great diversities of opinion have ever prevailed, and ever will prevail. Yet judge not thy brother, because on some point, comparatively unimportant, his views differ from thine. To his own master, each servant must stand or fall. And so it is in the great political questions which divide the world. He is not necessarily an enemy to his race or accursed of his God, who

desires to see human governments carried on upon principles different from those which we have learned to advocate. We may combat his views, should the necessity arise, and offer every resistance to their being carried into practice; but let us not judge the author of them. His aim may be, and probably is, as high as our own; though, in our partial judgment, he has missed the proper line through which to carry it out.

All these, and many other minute points in the conduct of human affairs—of those affairs which, however troubled and unsatisfactory they may appear to be, will lead in your cases and in mine, and in the cases of all around us, to results which cannot now be calculated—are evidently referred to in St. Paul's admonitions. But perhaps the sense in which, above all

others, it becomes us to understand them, has reference to the mode in which we are apt to deal with ourselves, considered as creatures who must give an account before the Lord's throne of all the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad. We judge *ourselves* by too favourable a judgment. We know our duty, and discharge it not; and then come to the fatal conclusion, that such extreme Christian excellence never could be required at our hands. Now we have all read of the rich man who came to the Lord, and said, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" His complacency also is familiar to us; while he boldly stated that from his youth up he had kept God's commandments; yet, how felt he when the Lord added this one condition more—"If thou wilt be perfect, sell

what thou hast, give to the poor, and come and follow me?" The rich man deemed this price too exorbitant to pay, even for eternal life. He could not bring himself to purchase an admission into heaven by the sacrifice of his earthly treasure. Why? Because he was very rich. Wherein do we differ from him? Not in the temper which is established in our souls,—not in the relative importance which we attach to time and to eternity; but only in the matter, it may be the mode, through which we would fain connect the one with the other. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are they

that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Fall these blessings upon us? Are we poor in spirit, meek, merciful, pure, hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Well, then, read on: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. It is profitable for thee that one of thy members suffer, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." What favourite pursuit have we ever relinquished, because we felt that it withdrew us from God and the thought of the world to come? yea, what vice have we cast aside, which long habit had endeared to us? And yet we are at ease. And yet we judge, that of this, our weakness, as we vainly term it, no account will be taken at the Lord's second coming.

I think, then, that the sentence which

has this day supplied us with a text will receive its just interpretation from him who exercises in all things that are without the widest possible charity; who tries himself,—his own proceedings, his own motives, his own wishes, by the most unyielding test that conscience can apply. “Lay not up for yourselves,” saith the Lord, “treasures upon earth, where the moth and rust doth corrupt; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.” Live *in* the world, but not *for* the world. Set not your heart upon any thing that earth can offer. We charge you not with gross and flagrant sins—far from it. You have too much regard for the opinions of men to sink yourselves

thus low. You dare not cast behind you station and character, and good name. But, indeed, this is not enough. You must wean your affection from pomp, wealth, show, parade, glitter, folly. These things are not real. They are shadows, that have passed, and are passing; and the worst of it is, that they come between you and salvation, because they hide your true condition from yourselves. I do not say, withdraw from society, or put on a manner when ye enter into it, that shall repel or chill such as would approach you. But remember, that for the use to which you apply every hour of your mortal life, you have an account to give. Therefore, judge nothing rashly before the time, whether ye arraign yourself, or others, before you;

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for the Lord will come, bringing the hidden things of darkness to light, and making manifest the very secrets of the heart.

SERMON VII.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

PHILIPPIANS IV. 5.

“ The Lord is at hand.”

GRADUALLY, and with a wise and holy preparation, the Church has led us forward to the point at which we have this day arrived. By the passages of Scripture which she has marked for our perusal,—by the terms of the petitions wherewith she has taught us to approach the throne of grace,—we have, from day to day, and from week to week, been more and more awakened to a sense of certain solemn

realities, both here and hereafter, from which there is no escaping. First, we have prayed, at her bidding, that “we might find grace to put away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now, in the time of this mortal life, in which the Lord Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility;” and the reason which, in our Father’s presence, we assign for this our earnest desire is, “that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through Him who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost.” The prayer is a very touching one; it is felt in the heart of the believer as he speaks it; and a chord is struck, which awakens there sounds of deep and solemn import. They are vague, so to

speak, and as yet general—thrilling in the blood, doubtless, yet operating more as the distant thunder operates upon a wanderer through a wide and desolate moor, than with the shock and the violence of the storm when it breaks upon him. We are roused as it were, while we pray, from the mistaken feeling of security into which we may have fallen. There comes over us a conviction, that all is not quite so right within as we could wish it to be; that the works in which we engage daily are not, in every instance, such as would bear to be exposed before men and angels; that while walking in the light of the natural sun, our souls are, somehow or another, in darkness. Visions, too, of the second coming of Him, who eighteen hundred and forty years ago dwelt among men in great humility, rise up to affright us.

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We call to mind the threats and promises of Scripture; and as they one by one pass across the foreground of our imagination, the very walls around seem to become crowded with shadowy images. We are alarmed—we are shaken. We think of the great judgment-day as surely drawing towards us, and though as yet no sign be granted whereby to judge of the progress which it is making, enough has been accomplished to make us commune with our own hearts, in our own chambers, and be still.

Having effected this most important end, the Church puts into our mouths a second prayer, the very utterance of which serves, in some degree, to abate the depth and indistinctness of our terror. We are taught by her to petition, that the Lord, who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, would enable us

so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of his Holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life. Our attention, you will observe, is still fixed upon the Judge and his tribunal. We are not permitted for a moment to forget, that both quick and dead shall one day be gathered round the Lord's throne. But it is not now with deeds of darkness, and the terrible results to which they will then lead, that our thoughts exclusively connect that dread event. Life, not less ^{than} ~~that~~ death, is now before us. We perceive that the very object of this great assembly is, that the Lord may justify his ways before the universe ; and, having dispensed mercy with a free hand, while yet men were in the flesh, may now deal with them accord-

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ing to the dictates of unerring justice. Not, therefore, to certain condemnation are we advancing,—the season of trial is still ours,—we may, if we be willing, improve it to the salvation of our souls; and surely the willingness cannot be wanting. Nay, nor is this all. The terms of our prayer direct us to a beacon which has never yet deceived any one that trusted to it. The Holy Scriptures are within our reach. We acknowledge that the Lord caused them to be written, yea, and for our learning too; and we ask for grace and power to deal with them aright. How the spirit, after having thus delivered itself of the burthen of its wants, springs upwards!! Glory be to God, the prize of everlasting life is before us, and He, who, of his infinite mercy, placed it within our view, has himself taught us how we may attain

to it. Brace up thy loins, then, and press onwards. So long as the lamp of God's Holy Scripture burns, and sheds a light over thy path, thou canst not either stumble or err from the right way. But, woe, woe for us! The Scriptures lie open on the table before us, and our eye wanders from line to line, but our hearts and minds are not in the work, and though we read, we derive from the operation no comfort to our souls. The world, too, is ever present with us. Business, pleasure—this call upon our attention or that—distract and unfit us for the office of self-examination. How can I, on whom so many cares are pressing—whom society claims as its own—who mix so much and so freely with my fellow-men—how can I find leisure to apply to my own individual case the many precepts, the very many admonitions and

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warnings which crowd the page of the sacred volume? I know that the last day is coming, and that I must meet, when it dawns, a Judge whom it is impossible either to deceive or to elude; but what good arises to me from this knowledge, seeing that I never can command time or attention enough even to understand fully what the Lord requires at my hands?

See, even in this extremity, how the Church comes to your assistance. Once again she bids you pray, and the terms of the petition which she puts into your mouth are precisely such as your melancholy position seems to require. Men occupied, like you, with the living world, require that there should be those at hand whose business and privilege it shall be to remind them that there is a far more important world beyond it. Men en-

grossed by society need others, constituted even as they are themselves, to recall to their recollection that more than society has claims upon them. Men, distracted by numberless cares, and anxious about the welfare of the body, need to have the great truth brought home to them, that they are wearying themselves, by chasing a shadow, if to the supply of the bodily wants all their foresight be directed. Observe, then, how the Church instructs you to pray. The Lord Jesus Christ is adjured by the memory of his goodness in former days,—by the mercy which he displayed of old in sending his messenger to prepare the way before him,—so to animate with his Holy Spirit the ministers and stewards of his mysteries, that they may succeed in turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,

and make ready, against the Lord's second coming, a people acceptable in his sight. Can any thing be more appropriate or solemn than this? It is still, you see, of the Lord's second coming that we are reminded. Other hopes may elude us, but this never; other expectations come to nothing, but of this the accomplishment is certain. Whether the Lord keep us here many years or few,—whether he remove us in our childhood, in our youth, in the maturity of our days, or in our old age,—still from the same grave,—whither men bear us,—we are destined to come forth again, and then to be judged. Moreover, the one great end of this our mortal life is, or ought to be, that we make ready for the last assize. Not that the Lord either exhorts or requires that all men should devote themselves conti-

nually to meditation, solitude, and prayer. The business of time, if it be rightly discharged, is in itself a preparation for eternity. The mind which occupies itself, to a becoming extent, in pursuits which have for their object the increase even of men's temporal comforts, is, to a certain extent, a benefactor to the world; and the great Creator, whose mercies are over all his works, will surely so account of him. There was not only no sin in the invention of the spinning-jenny and the steam-engine, but both, we may rest assured, have been acceptable in God's sight, because both have contributed, each in its own way, to add to the temporal comforts and conveniences of mankind. And if this be true in reference to objects which exhaust their power of usefulness on the perishable body, much

more will it apply to such as act upon the intellect, and the heart, and the soul. Every teacher of moral truth, whether he convey his instructions to his fellow-men orally or through the press,—every discoverer in science, who opens up a fresh avenue through which to adore the wisdom, the power, the goodness of the great Creator,—every enlightened statesman, who uses his influence to promote the best interests of the people over whom he has been called to preside,—every soldier who serves his country faithfully, and enforces discipline, and exercises mercy even in the cruel trade of war; yea, and all who, in inferior stations, make these great men their models, and prosecute with industry the duties of their calling, are, by so much, accomplishing God's will, and acting the part on earth which God has

assigned to them. At the same time there is not one among them all, who, if he permit the things of earth to draw him into a forgetfulness of heaven, will not be found, when the great account is taken, to have buried, as far as his own soul is concerned, his talent in the ground. And if, over and above this, he seek for relaxation from business in pursuits that vitiate the heart and dull the spiritual brightness of the soul, not all his genius, not all his talent, will save him from becoming a partaker in the inheritance of those to whom outer darkness shall be assigned. Great need, therefore, there is, that the highest as well as the lowest, the most richly endowed not less than the simple-minded and unlettered man, should pray for the ministers and stewards of the Lord's mysteries, that they may be en-

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abled to prepare and make ready the way against the Lord's second coming. For were there no such class of persons in existence, or were they neglectful, as a body, in the work of their high calling, there needs no very intimate acquaintance with human nature to convince us that all thought of judgment and the world to come would soon die out among men.

All this has been well and most wisely arranged. There is given to our devotions a tone and a spirit which cannot fail, if there be one spark of right principle within, to operate to our souls' comfort. The very words which we utter in God's presence,—the very terms in which we make known to him our wants and wishes, serve, in some degree, to direct us to the point where there is the best chance, at least, of having these wishes

fulfilled. Not even yet, however, does the Church desert us.

We have examined ourselves in secret, and found that the armour of God is not upon us. We have striven, in our dismay, to put aside the works of darkness, and gone to the Holy Scriptures for the information of which we experienced the want. We are still pressed down by a weight of trifles, and our attention wanders and our faith fails; and so we go to the ministers and stewards of the Lord's mysteries, beseeching God that they may be able to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. Are we satisfied now? Is all at peace within us? Can we believe that the great day is near, yet flatter ourselves that we are in a fit state to face it? Oh—no, no, no: “through our sins and weaknesses we are sore let and hindered

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in running the race that is set before us." We see where the narrow path lies. We would fain enter upon it and pursue it; but there are so many incumbrances in our way, so many cords which pull us backwards, that all our struggles,—and they have been many and severe—do not avail to place us where we desire to be. What shall we do now? Whither shall we turn? Go to the Church again, and place thyself under her guidance, and she will put words in thy mouth which, if aught can avail, will cause thy prayer to enter into the ear of the Most High, and bring back its answer. "Oh Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us. Oh Lord, forsake us not; our strength is very feebleness; our natural hope, mere despon-

dency ; our faith, but a faltering, flickering, and uncertain doubt ; our whole condition, abject and miserable. The world has made us its slave,—its unwilling slave, yet still a captive ; tied and bound with the chain of our sins ; let and hindered from running the race that is set before us. Oh Lord, come among us, and with great might succour us, and let thy bountiful grace and mercy speedily deliver us ; for if now, at the eleventh hour, we be forsaken of thee, Oh Lord, what is to become of us ?” Can you conceive any arrangement of divine worship more admirable than this ? Are we not deepening in the fervour of our devotions from week to week ? Can we hear such words, and repeat them, and send up with them our spirits to the throne of grace, without feeling—at least

for the moment—that in comparison with this great end of all, time, with its multitudinous concerns, is the merest trifle? The thing is impossible. Even if we came here to mock, we must have stopped to pray. Let us but retain the influence of our prayer about us, and the effects to our souls may be blessed in the extreme. Yet remember at the same time that he to whom these great advantages are offered will be tried for the uses to which he has turned them. The servant that knew not his master's will, and did it not, is beaten with few stripes; the servant that knew his master's will, and went against it, is beaten with many. Take care that the latter fate be not yours.

SERMON VIII.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

PHILIPPIANS IV. 5.

“ The Lord is at hand.”

THE hour is coming, more speedily, perhaps, than we now think, when the words which are here repeated as an extract from an old book will be rung through the universe by the voices of angels. The hour is coming, more rapidly than perhaps we desire, when, from east to west, and from north to south, shall be heard in the air, on the land, and through the depths of the sea, the trumpet which

proclaims this cry, "The Lord is at hand." With what eagerness will the living lift up their heads to listen—with what astonishment will the dead catch the sound in their desolate dwellings. The pomp, the parade, the glory of that day;—the greatness, the majesty, the power of its mighty Lord;—the glittering brightness of the throngs that attend him;—his throne of light;—his cloudy canopy;—what strength of human imagination will dare to deal with these things even in secret?—what boldness of human language venture to speak of these things openly to others? It is vain, it is profitless, to dream of realizing a scene such as "ear hath not heard, nor eye seen, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive." All the magnificence which the world has brought before us,—the march

of mighty armies, the gathering of dense crowds,—fall infinitely short of the vision which our powers, feeble as they may be, are competent to arrange. And as this last must, we know, be to the reality but as the glimmer of the morning star to the full light of day, so, not without a sense of positive relief in the operation, we turn away from the idle and hopeless endeavour to throw into something like shape our scattered ideas. Let us leave the details of that great day to be settled as he who has appointed the moment of its coming shall determine. Much more to the present purpose it will be, if, following up the chain of reasoning to which the service of the Church has guided us, we endeavour to ascertain how the assurance of its approach really affects us,—whether we rejoice or are distressed by

it,—whether we hope or fear,—as the certainty of the event is brought home to our convictions. For slow as it becomes us to be in forming a judgment even of our own individual fitness to pass beyond this our theatre of trial to the land where trial ceases, one thing seems certain, that he who cannot anticipate both the hour of death and the day of judgment without horror is in no fit state to encounter either, let it come when it may.

There is one criterion, and only one, which the Christian man ever thinks of applying to the difficulty now before us. He looks back into his whole life, and trying it everywhere by the rule of the Lord's precepts, endeavours to ascertain whether it be or be not such as the Lord can rehearse without condemnation. Now, do not misunderstand what is

meant by all this. The best of living men remembers enough in the past to make him shrink as he contemplates what is now beyond his control, and feel, in bitterness and sorrow, his own unworthiness. The brightest vision of former years has always some dull spot in it, and not a few are so entirely darkened, that fain would he blot them out of the book of God's remembrance if he could. At the same time, the Christian man has read, and believes, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to be the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." There is a bright and blessed invitation from his Lord, which hangs upon his lip and lies in his heart ever:—"Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." There is an assurance, neither less blessed nor less

bright, which he would not barter away for a principality ; by which he learns, that “ there is more joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance.” What a home for itself in his heart this gracious assurance has made ! How it has sustained him amid the darkest hours of a remorse, which is now, perhaps, lightened. He is himself the sinner who has erred against light and knowledge, against mercies and warnings ; and well is he aware, and forward to avow, that were he dealt with according to his own deservings, no place could be found for him in the Kingdom of God or of Christ. But he cannot despair so long as this declaration woos him to hope ; yea, fervently, earnestly, fondly, because he feels that his repentance is unfeigned. Neither will he

permit himself to be defrauded out of this, his great treasure, by any narrowing interpretation which others may put upon the Lord's announcement. Wherever, in Holy Writ, men may profess to discover proof, that of sin committed after baptism there can be no perfect remission, the broken in heart satisfies himself that here, at least, so stern a doctrine receives no support. The prodigal in the story, when his father welcomed him back, had been, not less than his brother who abode still at home, born under the paternal roof. Yea, a member of the family he continued to be, even in his most dissolute moments; far removed, it is true, from the place of his birth, and the rest and peace which lingered there, but still a son; and it was because of the love which his father never ceased to cherish for him, no, not when he

most disgraced the name which he bore, that his return was greeted with the voice of melody, and himself dealt with as one who had been lost and was found. Oh, who that has passed through but a portion of life's journey, and known what it is to be sore tempted and to fall,—who that has experienced the anguish of that serpent's tooth, which gnaws unceasingly and will not be put to sleep; what fallen, erring, and most feeble child of clay, would part with this one tale, and its blessed, blessed moral, were whole worlds, with all that they can furnish forth of bright and fair, offered to him as the price? No, brethren, there is pardon for the sinner; yea, for him who has sinned after baptism, not less than for the unregenerate, who repents and believes, through Christ Jesus. And he who should

teach otherwise seems to me to go as far as man can well do to crush the single spark in the human heart which keeps it from freezing; and to people hell through the working of that despair which shuts out its victim from heaven.

The Christian man, in his endeavour to ascertain in what respect of hope or fear the anticipation of the day of judgment affects him, is not, therefore, forgetful of the many and grievous sins with which he stands chargeable. They are set down against him in two separate volumes—in the record which God keeps of man's proceedings, and in his own bleeding conscience. But to counteract their baneful influence, he calls to mind the words of promise which tell that the Lord “desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn away from

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his wickedness and live." The question, therefore, for him to determine, is, has he indeed repented? Can he affirm with truth that, weary and heavy-laden, he has gone, or is going, to Christ in search of rest? Is it the fact that by him "the unfruitful works and things of darkness have been put away; that he is dead or is striving to die to the body; that he lives or is striving to live to the spirit?" Let him not be too rash in asserting that the case is so; at least let him suspend his judgment for a moment till we shall have considered together what is meant by such expressions. How stands he then?

I do not ask whether you think, with horror, of some great and flagrant sin which you may have committed. I do not stop to inquire whether your present purpose be to perish rather than yield any

more to that temptation. Unless there be in you this mind, at all events, it is not worth your while or mine to push our inquiry farther; there can be no repentance without the deepest horror at the memory of sins past,—without the most earnest determination,—never—if God will but aid you with his grace—to sin again. But indeed, indeed, this is not enough. The abandonment of one sin, and whole rivers of tears shed because of its commission, will not make you a new creature in Christ Jesus. Your tastes, your views, your habits of thinking, as well as of acting;—your estimate of the present, your hopes for the future,—must all have undergone a great change—otherwise your repentance is incomplete. Formerly you lived for the things of time. To eat, and drink, and be

merry, to diversify labour with amusement, to enter into society, to frequent public places, to give and to accept such gratification as springs from the interchange of wit, or graceful manners, or lively talk ;—to seek out nature's fairest or grandest scenes, yet to derive from them no lesson of reverence and love for their great Author ;—such was the course of your existence—an existence of good repute, of honest fame, and of unexceptionable reputation ; yet that of one who is of the earth—earthy ; albeit, free from the stain of crimes that deface and dishonour. Your grievous sin, not known to the world, cast no shadow over your name ; and your general indifference to things sacred passed for mere good-humour among your acquaintances. Does this indifference continue ? Are you still of

the earth—earthly? I do not ask whether the memory of your heavy sin troubles you, for that I take for granted, as well as that you have abandoned it. But, in other respects is there no change; no elevation of thought, no consciousness of the world's incapability to fill up the measure of a wise man's desires? Believe me, then, that your repentance is nothing worth; for it has not led you to the foot of the cross, where alone sin can find its pardon. Think better, I pray you, of your state. Let the sting of remorse goad you towards higher things. Stay, and I will endeavour to describe to you the bearing of one who is indeed a penitent, and then you will have a surer test to apply to your own spiritual condition.

He who has sinned, and been awa-

kened to a sense of his own guilt, awakens to the reality not of one error, but of an entire lifetime of errors. He feels that, up to the present hour, he has mistaken the true end of his existence. He sees that he was not born to eat, and drink, and be merry; that he was not intended merely to diversify labour with amusement; that there are things both within and without far more deserving of his attention than public places, or the gay world's fascinations and enjoyments. He has a soul to be saved, and a world before him, to have a treasure laid up in which, is of infinitely more importance than the utmost extent of success that can attend him here. His thoughts will not now be tied down, as heretofore, to earth, its troubles, or its joys. He goes about among his fellow-men, little

changed, perhaps, in his outward manner, but in all that is within, an altered being. God is ever in his thoughts. He prays often when he seems to be very differently occupied. To be alone is now his chief recreation, because in solitude he is more free to hold communion with his Saviour. The hopes that stir him as they rise all wing their flight beyond the valley of the shadow of death. His one great and undying wish is, that God, of his infinite mercy, would render him meet to become a partaker in the inheritance of the saints in light. You will not observe in his business habits any remarkable change. He is still at his post, wherever duty calls him; and the part which has been assigned him to enact among men he performs. But business, as well as what the world calls pleasure,

has lost much of its hold upon his mind: he transacts it, because it is necessary—but his heart is all the while elsewhere. He has become very lowly, too, in his own esteem. The remembrance of the past—of mercies received — of warnings slighted — bow him to the dust. His heart is not merely contrite;—it is broken. I said but a moment ago, that in the ordinary manner of the penitent you may not be able to detect any great change. I believe that in this statement there is error. The casual acquaintances who greet him in the streets, or sit down with him to the social meal, or encounter him in society, may fail to perceive that he is different from what he used to be in days that are gone. But they who know him better see,—that he is graver, quieter, more subdued, more indifferent to passing events, less occupied

with plans for the future, less engrossed by the occurrences of the hour. The memory of his sin never leaves him : it comes in the room of sleep in many of the night watches ; and if it do not wring, as it once did, it softens and humbles him. Moreover, his love for God—his devotion to the Saviour—his longing to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, increase in depth and earnestness every day. Neither is there the shadow of presumption in this. It is not because he considers himself worthy that he would gladly go hence, and be seen no more ;—but because the necessary cares of life hang upon his soul like a burthen—and he believes that the Lord, when he takes him hence, will relieve him of these cares. Never say that the repentant sinner who loves his Saviour, and is ready at any

moment to lay down the burthen of the flesh, is bold and presuming. Remember that the servant in the parable, to whom his lord forgave much, loved more than his fellow-servant to whom the lord forgave little: and be assured that the very same results invariably follow, where repentance is indeed sincere, no matter how heavy the sin that comes to be repented of.

And now, having stated all this, it remains for me to ask, not only whether you understand, but whether you have experimental acquaintance with the great subject which we have been discussing together? You know that the Lord is coming; there are moments when you believe that he is at hand; you are not always as we now see you, robust in body and contented in your minds. Sickness overtakes you, as it does other men; and

when the clouds darken, you think of death. How does the thought affect you?—is it very alarming?—is it so horrible that, even on your sick-bed, you labour to drive it away? You are not, then, in a condition to bid the Lord welcome,—you are still in your sins. They may not be what the world calls deadly, but they are manifestly a load which your soul cannot carry; for they, and they alone, are the causes of your present anxiety. Get rid of the burthen without delay. Strive to become more spiritual, more holy, more pure. Do not live any more *for* the world, but, living *in* it, look for your place of permanent rest elsewhere. Pray to God that he will send you his Holy Spirit, to lighten your darkness and guide you to the truth. Teach yourself to hold more frequent and grave

converse with your own heart. Consider always that your hours are numbered, and that, let the Lord delay his second coming as long as he may, the time allotted to you for preparation diminishes daily. Be not afraid of your Creator. Fear nothing but sin, and arm yourself against its encroachments by prayer and self-control; for whether ye bear it in mind or forget it, the day of judgment is approaching. And woe be to him who, when the trumpet calls, shall shriek aloud his wild chorus to the sound !

SERMON IX.

C H R I S T M A S D A Y.

JOHN I. 14.

“ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among men ; and we beheld his glory ; the glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

THE season of expectancy having come and gone, and our minds being prepared by the religious exercises in which for some weeks past we are supposed to have engaged them, the Church requires that now, on the 25th day of December, we shall celebrate, with prayer and praise and

thanksgiving, the anniversary of the birth of Him in whom all the families of mankind have been blessed. Long and anxiously had the world waited for his coming. Not in that land alone where the voice of well-authenticated prophecy was heard, but far and near—in every nation, and among every people under heaven—wherever there survived a fragment of the primitive revelation, there lingered with it a hope, vague doubtless, yet not inoperative, that, sooner or later, a Divine Person would arise, by whom the sons of men should once more be taught how their Creator might most acceptably be worshipped. To this remarkable fact testimony is borne by the prophecies, whence originating no one can tell, of which, classic authors, and one of them a historian of distinguished name, make

mention ; while there are not wanting links of connection, whereby the ingenious are able to unite the superstitious usages of the most ancient people of whom we read with the hope that was excited, early and late, in the world's history, by God's great promise to mankind. The multitude in Egypt offered to the calf Apis divine worship, as often as he was born. The wiser and more enlightened treated the irrational creature with reverence, because they beheld in him a type or emblem of the Universal Benefactor, whom God, in his own good time, should send. In like manner, the Avatars, or successive incarnations of the Supreme Being, which are referred to in the sacred books of the Brahmins, agree with the various changes that occurred long ago in the moral and religious condition of the

world; while the last and greatest of them all, not yet brought to pass when the books were completed, points with a steady finger to the appearance of Him of whose coming in the flesh we are this day reminded. Moreover, in Chaldea and in Persia the hope seems ever to have flourished; yea, and to have become year by year more earnest;—till the rising of the star, or strange meteor, in the east warned the Magi that the appointed hour was at hand, and guided them to the birth-place of the Saviour—the stable of a poor inn at Bethlehem.

Nor will the thinking and the faithful man see in all this a single point at which to stagger—a solitary stumbling-block over which to fall. He knows that of the working of God's Holy Spirit a very narrow view is taken by such as imagine that its influence was felt nowhere

of old beyond the limits of the Jewish commonwealth. The Israelites alone, among the tribes and kindreds of men, retained in their national religion an unshaken loyalty to the unseen Creator. Everywhere else, through long, long ages, the popular creeds abounded in error, yea, and opened the door to the grossest and most debasing immorality, not alone in the daily habits of men's lives, but in the celebration of their most sacred ordinances. Yet the thinking and the faithful man is forced to admit, that there were in every land numbers, who, consenting by their outward manner to these grave abuses, cherished higher and holier views of God's majesty in their secret souls. The Persian crowd bent the knee to the visible sun, and to the element of fire, as representing this their great divinity. The Persian sage

looked beyond that bright emblem, and worshipped the unseen God, the sole Creator, and Governor of the universe. So it was in Greece ; so it was in Egypt. Of the primitive revelation, the memory nowhere died out, because it was in agreement with God's merciful purposes that this much of preparation should everywhere be made for the Gospel, which it was appointed that the Lord Jesus Christ should deliver to mankind. Moreover, the near approach to truth which, in the works of heathen authors, startles the inquirer, all speak to him of the operations of that blessed Spirit, which—in one form or another—is ever impressing upon the minds of men a consciousness of its presence. Not, therefore, into a world unprepared to receive him was the Son of God, as on this day, born. And the ex-

traordinary success which attended the labours of his poor and lowly disciples, proves that the same Almighty power which devised and brought the scheme of man's redemption to its completion was present with the witnesses to the Lord's life and doctrine, and enabled them to fulfil the object of their mighty mission.

In the earliest times the Church of Christ, wherever planted and however circumstanced, treated the anniversary of the Saviour's birth with deep respect. Among us it is thought of as altogether a season of gladness; and the light in which we have accustomed ourselves to regard the matter naturally leads to this result. We think only of the inestimable benefit of which the Lord has made us partakers. We look to Jesus as our great benefactor, as the author and finisher

of our faith, as our Redeemer, as our Mediator with the Father, as one who came into the world to save the world, and gave his life a ransom for the transgressions of many. In all this we judge rightly, and having these blessed images constantly in our minds, it is no easy matter to shade our joy with any tinge, be it ever so light, of sadness. The primitive Christians took of the subject a somewhat different view. Sad they were not, for their thoughts were so turned towards their Lord and Saviour, that be their immediate sufferings what they might, they derived comfort and strength from the exercise. But their stricter and more righteous view of the event overwhelmed them with astonishment ; and mixed up no inconsiderable portion of reverence with their gratitude. Of all the occurrences in the Saviour's history

his birth was in their eyes the most awful. Let even a divine person put on the garb of humanity, and it is in the very order of things that he should die. But that the Second Person in the ever-blessed Trinity should stoop so low as to take upon him our nature and become subject to our weaknesses, and open to our troubles, this thought it was which, more than all others connected with the subject, overwhelmed them. "Lord, what is man," was their cry, "that thou so regardest him?" yea, what indeed? How can we estimate the extent of His condescension, who, for our sakes and to save a world, consented to veil for a season his own glory in the flesh? We have no power to effectuate this. Our thoughts, if we venture to send them so far abroad, never fail to return to us with wings drooping and feeble; and we are

content to say with the Apostle, that “without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness.”

Of all the occupations to which rational men can apply themselves, the most unsatisfactory by far is that which carries them into the habit of asking reasons for God's dealings with his creatures. There is not in the wide universe—whether we look to things temporal or things eternal—a single operation of what we call nature that is not sunk for us in the very depths of mystery. We cannot account for the strange fickleness of the atmosphere, far less reconcile the extent of sickness and of suffering it occasions to the notions which we cherish of God's goodness and his power. We see in the moral world around us inconsistencies and contradictions innumerable, and imagine—perhaps

have the hardihood to say—that we could have arranged things better. We are startled by the prevalence within our own bosoms of tempers, which we feel ourselves drawn on by resistless impulse to indulge, knowing all the while that we shall bitterly repent it. The growth of plants, the generation of animals, the nature of life, the cause of death—all are to us secrets which we cannot unravel. But we do not disbelieve these things ; nor is it possible for us in our graver moments to doubt that they are, in every respect, arranged for the best. In like manner, this great doctrine of God manifest in the flesh sets our powers of explanation at defiance. Why did the Divinity stoop thus low ? Would it not have more become him to send some bright and glorious spirit to do his bidding—or to have

intrusted the moral and religious education of the world to men themselves? We answer, that though the former of these demands cannot be met, the very same principle which urges us to acquiesce in all God's arrangements of the visible world prompts us to believe that those which he *has* made for the spiritual world were made in perfect wisdom. Why? Because they are God's doings, and we are too conscious of our own weakness to call their excellency in question. Besides, our ignorance of the reasons for this marvellous condescension on God's part furnishes no argument—affords not so much as ground for assuming that there may not be reasons for it in abundance. We cannot find them out, any more than we can discover why a good and great Creator should dispense his judgments

and his mercies indifferently on the righteous and the wicked. Wherefore the whole transaction is a mystery—but it contradicts no clear principle of our reason. For all that we can say concerning it is, that we never could have calculated beforehand on so marvellous an event; and that now, after it has taken place, we are incapable of assigning a reason for its occurrence. God might have redeemed mankind in a thousand different ways, if he had seen fit to adopt any one of them. He did not choose to adopt any other; and here is an end to our argument.

On the other hand, there is something in the idea of this complete amalgamation having once, at least, taken place between the Divine and the human natures, which cannot fail of operating beneficially on the

mind and heart of every right-thinking person. We become elevated in our own eyes, from the recollection that there was a time when the Son of God moved hither and thither, encompassed by the like infirmities with ourselves. Earthly though we be, there is more than appertains to earth about us; and our spirits rise, in consequence, above the world, as often as we make the smallest endeavour to shake them free from the burthen of the flesh. Yea, and we the more respect one another. The new-born babe, in his cradle, becomes to us an object of reverence. Such as he is now, the Lord Jesus once was. Do we not feel that a Divinity hedges him in? Is not the very atmosphere that hangs over him when he sleeps, holy? and for ourselves, we are indeed the temple of the living God.

The Lord was our brother here upon earth ;
He is our brother still in heaven. Glory
be to God for the revelation of this great
mystery. Of the nature of angels we may
never, perhaps, partake ; because, if the
universe be arranged above us in the
same order which prevails below, there is
between these bright beings and ourselves
a gulf fixed which we shall never be able
to pass. But we have no right to lament
this. God has joined His nature not to
that of angels but to that of men. In
the bright and happy world which the
Saviour has prepared beyond the grave
for such as love and serve Him here upon
earth, we shall find such occupations and
society as shall fill up all the measure of
our longings.—For there the Lord himself
shall be present with us : and where His
glory is—that of the highest of the minis-

tering spirits that surround His throne, will pale, and grow dim.

But while we thus open out our hearts to the holy influences which a contemplation of the unspeakable goodness of our Heavenly Father is on this day well calculated to bring into operation, let us not forget that the same Lord who died to redeem us from our sins, lived to instruct us in our duty. On the anniversary of his birth it well becomes us, therefore, to hold with our consciences grave and earnest communion; because the feeble child, born as on this day, was sustained, and carried on to manhood, in order that from his lips the world might receive a distinct revelation of its Maker's will. There is no more plea of ignorance, therefore, if we fail to attain the mark of the prize of our high calling. Life and death have been placed

distinctly before us. To win the former, we must toil along the narrow path, and strive to press through the strait gate ; to attain to the other, we need but follow the broad way, and the wide gate will, of its own accord, open to receive us. Do not think lightly of the choice. The broad way may be smooth at first—for he who treads it yields to every passion as it rises, and chafes at nothing—except when his immediate wishes are thwarted ; whereas the narrow begins in severe self-denial—in a steady determination to conquer every feeling which would lead to a forgetfulness of God's will and our own responsibility at the day of judgment. But, be not misled by such appearances. He who puts no curb upon his desires—who lives for earth and the things of earth, gradually discovers, even before sickness

and death come, that he has made an unwise choice; and gladly, most gladly, would he try a different course, but that his habits are now fixed, and he has no strength to alter them. Whereas the patient and self-denying Christian—who puts a constraint upon himself every day; who desires only to be useful to his fellow-creatures,—and before his God, honest, gentle, true, devout: that man's troubles and difficulties diminish continually; till in the end, privations cease to be felt as such, because a far higher and holier joy has taken their place. It may require a struggle to refrain from *this* scheme of personal gratification, or *that* in order that the cost of it shall go to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. But to-morrow—when both acts shall alike be among things past—on which shall we look back with the

most intense gratification? And then, when next the same option is submitted to us, shall we not make our choice with a greatly diminished reluctance?

These things are even so; and if at other seasons of the year they be apt to escape from our memories, surely we cannot be guilty of this forgetfulness now. We have seen the hand of God, through the weeks that are gone, striving, as it were, to guide and direct us in the right way. The preparations which we have made to hail once more the anniversary of our Lord's birth in Bethlehem speak to us, in terms which are not to be misunderstood, of his return to judge the world. What visible signs shall go before and usher in that event we cannot tell—for the Lord has, with equal wisdom as mercy, shrouded it from us. But so long as we are convinced

of the great fact itself, other information regarding it seems to be unnecessary. Remember, then, that as surely as ye now greet the day of the Lord's humiliation, you will by-and-by be called on to welcome the day of his glory, and that there can be no peace of mind for him who is not striving to make ready for the latter event, by living to the Lord, that in the Lord he may die.

SERMON X.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS, 1843.

GALATIANS IV. 7.

“ Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son ; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

THE design of St. Paul in the letter or epistle of which a brief portion was read in our hearing not long ago, was to convince the Jewish converts in Galatia that the disposition which had arisen among them to grudge to their Gentile brethren a full participation in the benefits of Christ's meritorious death and passion, was at once unreasonable in itself, and

diametrically opposed both to the spirit and the letter of that Gospel of which they professed to be the disciples. He manages the argument—a very important one in those days—with the skill and energy which characterize all his writings. He reminds the Galatians of the zeal, exclusive and persecuting, with which he himself had once upheld the supremacy of the law, “while, as yet, he profited in the Jews’ religion above many that were his equals in his own nation, being more exceedingly zealous than they of the traditions of the fathers. But,” continues he, “when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me, by his grace, to reveal his Son unto me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.” Into the mind of the zealot,

vehement, yet honest, a great light had broken. He discovered, all at once, that down to that hour the Scriptures had been read by him with a veil upon his heart. It was not now, as it had once been, that national promises and national precepts filled up every crevice in his memory and understanding. The law which he had been taught at the feet of Gamaliel to consider as the last and greatest of all God's revelations to men, was now regarded as nothing more than a dispensation, forced on, if I may so speak, by the weight of circumstances ;—full of imperfections, narrow in its limits, and totally unfit for a state of society different from that which prevailed in Palestine alone. Moreover, so far from taking the place of the purer and simpler system under which the Patriarchs lived

and died, it had been applied to that system to sustain it against the effects of a deepening barbarism among their descendants ;—as men build weighty buttresses to strengthen and support a wall which has begun, through the operations of time, to lean to one side, or in the extent of which cracks and fissures are becoming apparent. For to the ever-recurring and ceremonious observances which the law enjoined ;—to the sacrifices, daily, or monthly, or yearly, which the priests offered up, no other merit attached than this—that they hindered a rude people from forgetting that one God governed the universe, and kept them, by the acknowledgment of this great truth, distinct, for a season, from the other kindreds of men. But not only was this state of things not designed to last for ever,

but ages before the law was delivered from Mount Sinai, God had provided against the coming of that fulness of time, which should lead to its abolition ; for Abraham was made happy by the promise,—not that his posterity should possess a monopoly of God's favour for ever,—but that in him all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Moreover, the Patriarch, when he received this assurance, had not so much as submitted to the rite of circumcision. He was still but an individual member of God's great human family—worshipping, as others did, in spirit and truth, without regard to the place, or the time, or the form of his adoration : and to him so uncircumstanced the Apostle bears this bright testimony that Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

In like manner, though throughout long ages of religious darkness elsewhere, a laborious ritual kept alive in an obscure corner of the earth a feeble spark, whence the flame of truth might, in God's own time, break forth again to illuminate the world, it was not by the law, nor by the ceremonies enjoined in it, that the spark in question was fed. The law was to the truth what the framework of a lantern is to the candle within. It kept off the wind and the rain, and so hindered the light from being extinguished. But, in producing that light, it had no share; yea, it rather obscured and dimmed it. For so rigid were the law's enactments, that men could not swerve from them by ever so slight a deviation, without incurring the hazard of a curse. "Cursed is every one," writes

Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy, wherein the whole of the law is summed up, "that continueth not in all things that are written in the law, to do them;" a terrible denunciation, truly, when you call to mind that there was not an operation of the Israelite's waking existence over which the law failed to exercise some influence. Well, therefore, might St. Paul assure his Galatian brethren, that one of the many blessings which the Lord had conferred on them was to be found in the fact that "Christ had redeemed them from the curse of the law." The stern denunciation of Moses was at length repealed. In Jesus the law had received its accomplishment; and passing away like a cloud which has discharged its moisture, it left both heaven and earth at liberty to rejoice once more in the perfect free-

dom which the Gospel has secured to the whole family of mankind.

In the same spirit, though with a somewhat altered phraseology, the Apostle argues in that portion of his letter, which the Church has appointed to be read as the Epistle for this morning's service. There the Israelites, while the law continued yet in force, are likened to the heir of some great man, who is still in his nonage—subject, like the servants that wait upon him, to be ordered hither and thither by governors, and so far at least less master of himself than they,—that not a moment of his time is exempt from the labour which may be imposed upon him by his tutors. “Even so we,” says the Apostle, “when we were children,” as far as regarded the whole counsel of God, “were in bondage under the elements

of the world." In all our law there is not a sentence which speaks of the worship of the heart, or of the faith which lifts the soul to Heaven. From first to last, it is ever "touch not, taste not, handle not," as if the glory of God could be promoted by observances so inconsiderable, or the nature of man purified and elevated by a sleepless attention to meats, drinks, and the wearing of particular garments. "But when the fulness of time was come," says St. Paul, "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." With as much reasonableness might the heir, after he has attained to man's estate, and been admitted by his father to all the privileges of companionship,

pine to return to a state of pupilage, as you affect to grieve because the law is no more enforced upon yourselves and upon others. Ye have passed this law by, and left it behind you ; it has no more dominion over you. All that ever was of value in it prevailed long before it came into existence, and will continue to be of force till time shall cease. The moral duties of life are the same now that they were from the beginning ; but in this we are more favoured than our fathers were, that the light which the Gospel sheds over these duties shews to us what they might not at all times be able to perceive, their perfect fitness to man's condition, in time as well as in eternity. To be upright, just, pious, generous ; to exercise a constant control over ourselves ; to look for our own happiness in

promoting the happiness of others,—these tempers do not bring us into bondage ; they rather set us free. We are slaves to the flesh as long as we obey its impulses ; and sooner or later the yoke presses heavily upon our necks. We are the sport of feelings and of passions that irritate and torment ; the moment we relax that constraint over ourselves which the Lord enjoins us to exercise. We are the creatures of our own vanity, or of some meaner impulse, if a meaner impulse there be, when, rather than forego the indulgence of some whim or curtail some needless expenditure, we leave the hungry unfed, and miss the reward which the performance of a kind and noble action never fails of bringing in its train. These results of the law of right and wrong are like the law itself of eternal endurance.

But over and above that law, and the results that spring from it, the Lord has shewn us better things. The elements of the world tie *us* not down. There are no limits to the privileges in which, through him, we have become partakers. We are the sons of the Most High; and because of this, "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father!" "Wherefore, thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God, through Christ." Is all this intelligible? Is all this plain? Let me hope and believe that it is; for out of a right understanding of these matters comes an increase to our faith, and a growing elevation and fixedness in our purposes, rendering us day by day more meet, through the grace which is given, to become, in God's own

time, partakers in the inheritance of the saints in light.

There is nothing more marvellous in a wise man's eyes, among the many strange spectacles which human life spreads out before him, than the pitiably low and unworthy estimate which persons, otherwise thoughtful and of sound judgment, form of the privileges that appertain to them as members of Christ's family upon earth. To hear them speak, and to judge from their manner of life, one might suppose that there was something mean and dastardly and degrading in the character of a Christian. They see no glory in the attainment of the most difficult of all conquests, the conquest over themselves. They cannot perceive that, in exact proportion as the body is mortified and brought under the dominion of the spirit,

the whole moral being becomes refined, purified, and ennobled. They seldom deny that the common pursuits of what is called society are frivolous and vain in the extreme, and that no feeling of contentment follows upon a day devoted to the world's service. Yet they pertinaciously refuse to look elsewhere for the ground-work of that self-respect, for the absence of which nothing can make amends. Perhaps this unhappy temper may originate, to a certain extent, in the unjust light in which the religion of the Saviour has been heretofore offered to them for acceptance. They may have seen men only of narrow minds, and narrower prejudices, make a vehement display of their Christianity; as if the spirit of Christianity were not expansive as the breadth of heaven, and free in its charities as the winds that

blow. And if the case be so, to the exact extent of this their misleading, their fellow-men, even while they blame, are bound to make allowances for them. But we have no more right to form our opinion of the religion of the Saviour from the manners of its mistaken professors, than we should be justified in coming to a decision upon the importance of the healing art from the absurdities and mistakes into which quacks and impostors fall. The Lord himself has directed us to the one pure fountain, where alone our thirst after the knowledge that leads to salvation can be quenched. "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye have everlasting life." Search the Scriptures, and you will find, that the accomplishment of that great scheme, which has opened up to us once more the gate of everlasting life, has

made us no more servants, but sons ; and if sons, the heirs of God, through Christ. Sons of our Father which is in heaven ; and heirs, through Christ, of that same Father—that is to say, united with the Creator in our spirits now, and waiting till, in a better world, the union shall become more perfect, because more palpable. And the qualifications required of us for admission to these high privileges are, that we shall, with God's help, conquer the passions that debase, and the propensities that pollute us. What would you have that is great, and glorious, and noble ? Are not your dealings now with the Father of the universe ? Your admission into the Church has rendered you sons, not servants : it is the will of your Father, not of a tyrant, which ye are invited to obey. And the results of obe-

dience are to yourselves hope, when earthly sorrow comes, of bright things beyond the earth;—moderation, peace, contentment, gratitude, when your Father sheds his blessings on you here. It is a cruel wrong upon the religion of Christ Jesus to regard it as a badge of the soul's slavery. The Christian is the only free man that treads the earth; for having mastered himself through the grace of God's Holy Spirit, he can never submit to become the slave of others: his Lord has made him free.

At the same time, do not misunderstand all this. The Christian's portion is indeed a noble one, because he has become, through Christ, a son of the everlasting God; yet the consciousness of his admission into the family of his Redeemer tends to humble him in his own eyes—not to puff

him up with the pride which cometh of the earth. And this humility it is, this never slumbering conviction, that he is not worthy of the favour which the Lord has bestowed upon him,—that he has no right in himself to the inheritance that has been purchased by his Saviour, which renders him ever watchful over himself, lest, by any act even of inadvertency, he might bring discredit on the faith of which he is the professor. The true Christian may be as indulgent as a regard to truth will allow towards other men,—himself he never spares. He feels that his own life cannot be too pure, his own conversation too holy, his own faith too firm; because the son is unworthy of the name, who loves not his father earnestly, and esteems it not a privilege to make the extent of his love known by the

care which he manifests to please his father in all things. Is it not a great thing to feel that you are in communion with your Maker now?—and that death will only render this union more intimate? Are you not raised, by the conviction, in your own estimation, so high, that the world's most dazzling temptations cease to be attractive to you? Remember, then, that to fear God with the fear which takes its hue from reverence and to love the Redeemer as the author to you of good inestimable,—to walk as the Scriptures require, and to hope as the Scriptures direct,—is not only not mean, or dastardly, or degrading, but is the loftiest station to which the sons of men can attain here upon earth. The Gospel, and that alone, shews us how this end is to be accomplished. Take ye the great truths which are there revealed,

for your instructors, and doubt not the issue. He whom you worship with this holy worship, will never leave you nor forsake you, till he has taught you to feel "that thou art no more a servant, but a son."

SERMON XI.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, 1844.

LUKE II. 9.

“ And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”

HAVING schooled and trained us by her services for the Advent weeks to commemorate the birth of the Redeemer in a spirit of mingled joy and reverence; having taught us to associate the idea of his first coming in great humility with anticipations of the hour which shall witness his return in power and majesty to

judge the world ; having taught us the great lesson of submission to God's will, by exhibiting the Saviour as a feeble infant, subjected to the customs of the people among whom he had been born, circumcised the eighth day, and presented at the usual time before God in the Temple ; the Church goes on to open our minds to a more perfect understanding of the whole counsel of God by the institution of the festival of the Epiphany, and the apportionment of a certain number of days wherein it is to be kept especially in our remembrance. . The word epiphany signifies the making publicly known, the open and avowed manifestation of some purpose or design, some quality or privilege appertaining to a party or person who is the object of such epiphany. It is a term, the use of which, in reference to any in-

dividual, implies that the person so spoken of is no common man;—that he has no common part to play;—that his mission is a grave one, and that its issues will affect, for good or for evil, a considerable portion, at least, of the human race. You would never speak of the epiphany of a new acquaintance, whom, yesterday or the day before, you might have met or saluted for the first time. To such you are introduced, as he is introduced to you; there is nothing like an epiphany in the case. But supposing the Great Creator to make choice of one of yourselves, and to intrust him with some grave commission, out of which important results were intended to arise even to the circle within which he might be accustomed to move, it would be necessary that his right to be treated as God's special messenger

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should be demonstrated by a process such as could not be mistaken. His epiphany would take place when, by signs and wonders, either performed at his bidding or attending on his footsteps, God marked him as his own. The word epiphany therefore means the manifestation of some gifted or favoured being to the world, by such a process as shall leave on him an indelible stamp, if not of divinity itself, at all events of powers, which lift him far above the common range of those faculties which belong to mere human nature.

There are three separate senses in which the term epiphany, as applied to the Saviour of the world, is used by the Church. There was an epiphany, or manifestation, when the new-born babe lay in the manger, to which the witnesses

were the angelic throng that hymned his praise in heaven ; and the shepherds, who, keeping their flocks by night, saw that glorious company, and went with the tones of heavenly melody hanging round them, to gaze upon him in whom all the nations of the earth were yet to be blessed. Again, there was an epiphany when far away in Chaldæa, the star arose for which the Magi had long and anxiously looked, and guided by its movements that faithful band, born in a Gentile country, and aliens to the promises that were under the law, travelled towards the spot where the Virgin Mother lay, and in the inn at Bethlehem offered to their infant Saviour, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And last of all, the character and office of Jesus of Nazareth were determined, when on the banks of Jordan, after John had baptized

him, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost, descending with a wavering movement as a dove descends, fell upon him, and a voice proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." All these three separate and distinct testimonies to God, manifest in the flesh, the Church, by her festival of the Epiphany and in the weeks that immediately follow it, commemorates; and the objects which she desires to accomplish in thus dealing with the memory of her sons are in every point of view deserving of the care with which she treats them.

The Gospel for this morning's service gives an account of certain events which attended one of those visits to the Temple, which Joseph and Mary, in common with their country people at large, were in the habit of paying, as the law required,

for religious purposes. They had gone up, carrying the Virgin's son along with them, and were a day's journey advanced on their return home, when the child, a lad of twelve years of age, was observed to be missing. They sought him among their friends and kinsfolk in vain. He was nowhere to be found; and they, alarmed, as well they might be, turned back to the capital, there to renew the search. We are not told in what direction they first turned their steps; whether they repaired at once to the quarter of the town, where, during the feast, they may have sojourned, or sought him elsewhere; but this much we know—that two whole days were spent by them in pursuing their inquiry, and that on the third they discovered him where least of all a child so young might have been

expected to stray. They found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

Now it is necessary to a right understanding of the purpose of this narrative, to be aware, that particular seasons were, in the Temple, devoted to the public perusal of particular passages of Scripture; and that those which were read aloud and explained at the great festival of the passover, had all of them reference, more or less direct, to the coming of the Messiah. Thus the historical records, which set forth the order in which the first paschal lamb was slain and eaten, bear quite as much upon the great sacrifice on the cross, as any, the most distinct, of Isaiah's prophecies. In like manner, the passages in Daniel's book which relate to the Lord's visiting

his temple, and foretel the very date of his arrival, are too clear in their design to be by an unprejudiced person misunderstood. Both of these were read on the great day; and the latter in a spirit of intense anxiety. It is true, that both priests and people misled themselves by the interpretations which they put upon these passages. They did not see that the former was typical throughout. They fondly believed that the latter would receive its accomplishment in the restoration of Israel's glory, and the casting aside of the yoke of the heathen. And having kept from age to age a perfect reckoning of the prophetic weeks as they passed away, so about the period of our Lord's marvellous wanderings to the Temple, their expectations were wide awake—for they felt that the hour was at hand. It was

therefore no common conversation which the child Jesus carried on with them, when his mother and Joseph found him after their anxious search. He heard what they had to say about these passages of their own scriptures. He questioned them concerning the grounds of the opinions which they professed. And so much of wisdom was there, both in his inquiries and his answers, that all who heard him were astonished at his understanding. There is a tradition handed down from early times, that from that day forth Jesus ceased not to be an object of interest, and of much more than curiosity, to all with whom he came in contact. And hence it is that the Church, treating this display of early wisdom as one more mark of God's presence with his Son, has caused us, on this the first Sunday after the Epiphany, to read, in our

public service, the narrative which St. Luke has embodied. For not unfairly is it argued, that here again there was a distinct Epiphany—a manifest record to the importance of the commission which the child Jesus was appointed to carry out. Moreover, it is past dispute, that, let the rest of the world deal with them as it might, there was one true heart from which these things departed never. The Lord's mother knew that HE was no common child. It had been told her, ere his birth, that he should be called the Son of the Most High ; and that he came to be the cause both of the rising and falling of many in Israel. And, though we have no right to assume that as yet she was permitted to see through what a melancholy process the great promise was to receive its fulfilment, still it is clear, from what the Evangelist

states, that no event befel her Son--no word escaped from him, but that she treasured it up, and referred to it on many an anxious occasion ere he suffered. Indeed, the tenor of his answer to the natural demand, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?" was well calculated to deepen the impression, which his employment, when they discovered him, could not well fail to have made. His was no child's excuse. His was no wayward vindication of an error.—"How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" as if, even then, long ere the prophetic age had been attained—long ere that baptism of the Spirit was administered, which seems to have roused into active exercise the Divine energies that slumbered within him,—the presence of God in his heart and mind had been felt. It was a marvel-

lous scene throughout, and never to her dying day could his mother forget it. For it awoke at the moment vague hopes, she knew not of what, and came back upon her with tenfold force, after the crucifixion and resurrection and ascension had merged hope of earthly things in a loftier principle.

All these events the Church has taught us by her weekly and daily services to commemorate; and now the question naturally arises, what object does she seek to attain by the adoption of this course? Are the truths conveyed to us mere matters of fact, bearing, it may be, on our speculative opinions, yet in no degree applicable to the ordinary tenor of our lives? Surely it is not so. Surely there is no single doctrine taught in the religion of the Redeemer

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which does not bear, with resistless power, upon the habits of the believer's life. And if this be true in other respects, surely its truth is manifested with more than common clearness in the case before us. Look at the great tale a little more minutely, and then say whether it be not a moral one throughout.

The Son of God is born of a pure virgin ; not merely that he may die for our sins, but that he may live to be our instructor in all things that concern our everlasting salvation. He begins this system of instruction from his earliest years. He is at every stage in his human existence to us a model and example. The feeble infant, in his mother's arms, receives the worship of men and angels. He grows up, unmoved by it, gentle and meek, and obedient to her who had brought him

into the world. He is about his Father's business continually. What is the business of his Father and of ours? Is it that we should pass out of the beaten track of life, and by signs and wonders—a great and conspicuous destiny—draw towards ourselves the attention of the world? Nothing of the sort; but that in the station of life, whatever it may be, which the Lord God has allotted to us, we should each strive to adorn in every thing the doctrine of God our Saviour; by worshipping continually, as our Maker desires to be worshipped, in our lives much more than by our lips. Our Father's business we carry out as becomes us, whenever we conquer the thoughts that would lead us into sin, and foster and keep before us, like lights in a dark place, the holier principles that guide our spirits to

his. There is no display in the Christian's career ; there is no ostentation in his bearing. Acts which cause the world to wonder may be praiseworthy or the reverse. Habits which draw upon us the gaze of our fellow-men are more likely to oppose than to promote God's true glory. But our Father's business, as it lies within each man's most secret heart, so it is never so effectually promoted as when we seek to promote it quietly. Never dream that ye will be able to take the kingdom of heaven by violence. It is with yourself, not with others, that, if ye desire to be saved, ye must wage war. Our Father's business is conducted in peace, truth, gentleness, sobriety, resignation to his will, hope in his goodness, faith which never wavers in his power and promises. We carry it on

wherever we may find ourselves, so long as the heart is pure, and the spirit elevated and holy. A good man works it out, with equal care in his own happy home, or in the place of his most distant wanderings,—on a ship's deck, or at the seat of war. There is no garb which may not cover a true and trusting heart,—there is no worldly occupation which may not be united with the business which our common Father has assigned to all of us to perform. Nor let us fail to bear in mind, that each stage of life, as we attain to, and pass it by, opens for us avenues peculiar to itself, whereby we may advance ever nearer and nearer towards the perfection which is on earth unattainable. Childhood, youth, manhood, old age—all have their temptations to be met, and their difficulties to be surmounted. And

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such is the power and unwearied mercy of the Lord, that the success with which, through his grace, we come forth from our struggle against one, gives us strength and courage to deal manfully with the others. Strive we, then, while young, as we increase in stature, to increase in wisdom also, and it will be found, when the great account is taken, that we have not striven vainly, seeing that we are in favour with God and man.

SERMON XII.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

JOHN II. 11.

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.”

YOU have listened this day in the Gospel for the morning's service to a passage from Holy Scripture, which will be very imperfectly read and understood by him who fails to perceive that it has been placed where in our liturgy we find it, for a purpose strictly in agreement with the

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objects of that religious season through which we are still passing. The Church has not yet laid aside the design of keeping our attention fixed, by the extracts from God's Word which she interweaves into her weekly services, on the manifestations which God made when the foundations of our faith were laid of the immediate presence of his Holy Spirit with the Lord our Redeemer. We are still, you will perceive, in the Epiphany. We are still tracing through the testimonies which from one side to another are borne to it, the wondrous fact that God is manifest in the flesh. When first that mighty event befel, and the child Jesus lay in the manger, a company of the heavenly host told that time was full;—and sang of glory to God in the highest, and of peace and good-will among men.

When forty days were expired, the infant, marked with the sign of his race, was presented in God's temple, and recognized by God's prophet as the salvation which his aged eyes had long desired to witness. By-and-by came the wise men from the East, following the star which guided them, and offering to the babe in his humble dwelling-place, gifts that were never presented except to kings or priests, or over the lifeless bodies of the departed. Then followed that journey to Jerusalem, of which it was our privilege on last Lord's day to speak, when the youth, wandering away from his mother's guidance, found a place among the teachers of his people, and entered with them into discussions concerning the true design of those ancient Scriptures which they read daily in the synagogues and Temple, yet ever

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with a veil upon their hearts. From that hour the personal history of the Saviour is, for many years, little better than a blank. We find no more recorded of him by the inspired writers than this—that he went down with Joseph and Mary to Nazareth; and that, abiding there, he was subject unto them, and increased in wisdom and in favour with God and man.

While the Lord thus dwelt unnoticed in the little town where his foster-father sojourned, God was preparing for himself, by a different process, another instrument in the great work of man's religious enlightenment. John, born like Isaac of old, long after both father and mother had ceased to hope for children, soon became an orphan; and passed, according to a well-authenticated tradition, into the care

of a body of persons of whose moral worth, darkened as it might be by stern fanaticism, it is difficult to speak too highly. The persons to whom I allude were the Essenes,—a sect or party in the Jewish Church,—which, engrafting upon the religion of Moses many wild and extravagant opinions, yet claimed to be, even more than their countrymen in general, the heirs of God's promises. The Essenes were never a numerous body in Judea ; neither can we fix, with certainty, the period of their rise as a sect ; but of their modes of living we are sufficiently informed, and they were these. The Essenes looked upon marriage as a sin. They dwelt apart from the rest of their countrymen in little communities of their own. They had all things so far in common that they

tilled the ground attached to their villages or small towns for the common good, and drew their provisions as they required them from the common store. They never offered to God bloody sacrifices. They never attended any of the national festivals or fasts. They were singularly humane and charitable. They were rigid and gloomy observers of the Sabbath. Whenever they heard of an orphan, whom there was no one willing or bound to protect, they took the child and reared him up among themselves; and tradition says, that of the orphans thus dealt with, John was one. Moreover, the whole description of the Baptist at the beginning of his career,—his garb, his fare, and the place where he first shewed himself,—vouch for the truth of the tale. The Essenes lived very sparingly; they were less than homely in the apparel

which they wore ; and one of their principal settlements was in the wilderness beyond Jordan. Now of John Baptist, the Evangelist says, “ that he did baptize in the wilderness, and preach repentance for the remission of sins ; and that he was clothed with camel’s hair, and with a girdle of skin about his loins, and he did eat locusts and wild honey.” All this agrees perfectly with the account of the Baptist’s early youth which passed current in the primitive ages, and has from them come down to us. He doubtless learned both the roughness of his outward manner and the fervour and fearlessness of his zeal in the habitations of the men by whom his infancy and early manhood had been sheltered.

From time immemorial there had been a settled age among such as devoted them-

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selves in Judea to God's service as prophets, on their attainment to which, and not before, they entered upon the duties of their function. For the word prophet does not, in its strict acceptation, signify the mere foreteller of future events. A prophet, both among the Jews, and in the church of Christ in its earliest ages, was one who undertook to explain to his fellow-men the Word of God, and recall them to a sense of their duty. Under the law the time of life for undertaking this grave office was fixed at not less than the thirtieth year of the individual's life; and the Lord, who came not to destroy but to fulfil the law, attended even in this respect, to the customs of his country. St. Luke, who describes the entrance of Jesus on his career of gentleness and mercy, and

much suffering, and great goodness to man, states, that he then began to be about thirty years of age. Moreover, the Lord, who needed no baptism, paid in this, also, strict regard to the usages of his people ;—as a step preparatory to all others in the career which he had chalked out for himself, he went to John that by him he might be baptized. For John, six months older than the Saviour, was already preparing the way before him, and from far and near, men of all callings and shades of opinion flocked to him, seeking wisdom from his lips ; nor did they seek in vain. John, in the spirit and power of Elias, vindicated the honour that was due to God, and preached repentance and a candid spirit, such as might enable men to learn and profit by the still purer and holier doctrine, which it

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would be the business of Jesus to communicate so soon as his time was come.

Twice,—in some manner thrice,—Jesus of Nazareth had been manifested to the world already, as no common man. His baptism in the Jordan, after John had been persuaded to confer it, proved a means of obtaining for him fresh evidence of his interest with God. “It came to pass,” says the Evangelist, “that Jesus also being baptized and praying, the heaven was opened and the Holy Ghost descended in a visible shape, like a dove, upon him; and lo! a voice from heaven which said, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.” A manifest token this, that for some great and momentous purpose, the individual so distinguished had been set aside; and not unworthily, in these our commemorations

of the Epiphany are we, by the Church, in all ages required to bear it in remembrance. And then deep into the wilderness the Anointed One was led by the Spirit. For forty days he wandered there alone, holding converse with God and his own soul, and preparing himself, as other prophets were accustomed to, for the discharge of their functions, by fasting and self-examination, and earnest and solitary prayer. Yet, see how he bears himself so soon as his term of abstinence is ended, and he goes forth in the power and majesty of the Most High to instruct the world. There is no sourness in his deportment, no selfishness, no unnatural extinction of the kindly feelings that appertain to our nature and give to it its highest tone. The first step, indeed, is to gather round him a band of chosen wit-

nesses, who, accepting him as the promised Messiah, should be with him at all hours during the season of his humility, and thus be enabled to bear testimony, after he had returned into heaven, to the tenor of his whole life and conversation. His next, and it seems to have followed almost immediately, is to sanction, by his presence, a marriage-feast in Cana of Galilee. Was not this strange? No, not a whit. Jesus was not alone the Saviour of the world, but the anointed and commissioned ambassador from God to man. He came to inform the latter of his high destiny. His own life, indeed, was to pay the cost of man's renewed admission to a state of immortality beyond the grave; but it was from his teaching, both in deed and word, that man was to learn, how alone this immortality might become to him an immortality of happiness.

Now it may be, that there are minds so constituted, that they cannot mingle freely with others, yet escape contamination. When this is the case, let the individual who is conscious of his own great weakness withdraw absolutely from the world. By a life of seclusion and abstinence, by days and nights spent in solitude and prayer, he may subdue those passions which he feels himself unable to regulate, and thus, through God's great mercy in Christ Jesus, save his soul alive. But a life such as this is not required of all men ; yea, it is contrary to the design with which men were placed here. It may be endured in particular cases as the lesser of two evils ; but if applied as a general rule to any considerable number of persons, it would strike at the root of society itself, and lower man, by doing so, in the scale

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of God's creatures. The world, as its Almighty Architect has arranged it, needs busy and active inmates to turn it to account. There must be in the great human family statesmen as well as priests; mariners, merchants, mechanics, and labourers, not less than men of more contemplative habits. It is indeed from the jostling of all these apparently incongruous parts, that the whole machine comes forth with such exquisite fitness, mind playing into mind, as in the construction of the steam-engine, wheel, and piston, and cog, and lever, fall into one another, and harmonize its working. Neither was it designed by Him who placed us here, as in a school of preparation for a higher state of existence, that we should abstain from cultivating those generous and friendly impulses which come into operation merely

when we relax from our given tasks. Work is man's business, either with the arm or with the brain. The interchange of friendly and improving intercourse refreshes his spirit when toil has worn it down, and so long as this is sought for in purity of heart and in thankfulness towards the giver, next to the blessed privilege of prayer, it best restores man's strength. Wherefore the Lord Jesus, our pattern and example in all things, did not refuse to join in the innocent familiarities of his neighbours ; thus teaching us that we too may seek companionship where it may be found without sin, and where we may worship, by our cheerful and happy manner, Him who is to us the giver of all good. Nor can I omit to add, that by converting the water into wine ; by supplying, at his mother's request, the means of entertaining his

guests to one who lacked, yet sought not to abuse, the Lord recognized, yea sanctioned, the use in moderation of those gifts which come from Him who offers nothing in vain to his creatures. If indeed we feel that we cannot taste without the resistless desire coming over us to go on till we abuse ourselves, then indeed we shall do well to abstain altogether. But let there be no needless oaths nor pledges anywhere. It is a dangerous thing to load the soul with a vow or resolution hastily entered into, and in a moment of excitement; strive rather at all times to gain the mastery over yourselves, and God, who sees that you are in earnest, will sustain you in the efforts that you are making, and bring you triumphantly through them.

We are told in my text, that "this be-

ginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and that he thus manifested his glory, and that his disciples believed in him." Is there any great moral and religious lesson conveyed by the declaration? I am sure that there is. In the first place, the mighty process of which we have already spoken, is here again repeated. The Epiphany takes place once more ;—for it is the Lord's first miracle, and his glory is manifested by it. But this, though important, falls infinitely short, in a practical point of view, of the light which the Saviour's gentle proceeding sheds over the spirit of that religion which he came to establish. We learn, from the whole transaction, that there is no rank or situation of life which lies not open to the blessed influences of the Gospel's teaching. Men may differ, and

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do differ much, in the outward trappings that hang round them and in the pursuits which they follow. But if they hope, when this transitory being ends, to enter into the rest of the sons of God,—whatever their condition may be,—whatever their calling, their ordinary tastes and occupations,—one and the same spirit must pervade them all. A deep and honest piety towards God, a lively and earnest faith in the Saviour of the world, an honest desire, as far as their means extend, to benefit, if it be even by speaking comfort when they are sad, to all with whom they come in contact,—a readiness to deny themselves, should self-denial be required, either for the purpose of surmounting temptation, or to give the means of relieving the necessities of such as want ;—all these qualities are required

alike in the monarch, in the noble, in the peasant, in the artisan, in the soldier, in the civilian, in the young and in the old, if it be their desire to find a place now among the Lord's faithful followers, if they hope, after the Lord shall take them hence, to be numbered among his chosen. Moreover, all these qualifications are alike attainable by all. In worldly matters we travel by very many roads through life, to the grave. In the things which shall tell upon the ultimate condition of our lives there are but two paths from which to choose. Such as love the broad way will follow it, for a while, joyously enough ; but there is this terrible drawback attending it ; that in proportion as we move forward it grows ever more rough and more narrow, till by-and-by our hearts sink within us

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as we behold the point to which we have been led. Whereas, the narrow path, however cheerless at the outset, opens gradually, though it may be slowly, on brighter things, and shews at the far extremity that blessed land where dwell with him who redeemed them, angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. Be it our parts to affect this wiser choice, for thus alone may ye hope to find peace of mind here, and glory, and honour, and immortality hereafter.

SERMON XIII.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

MATTHEW VIII. 11, 12.

“And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven ; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

AGAIN, and yet again, are we reminded by the Church, in the portions of Scripture which she introduces into our public services, that we are still in the season of the

Epiphany ; and that not once nor twice, but by a thousand different processes, the Lord Jesus, in the days of his great humility, made himself known to men and angels as the long expected Saviour of the world. We saw him last Lord's day at a marriage-feast in Cana of Galilee, manifesting forth his glory, and winning the belief of his disciples. Hitherto they had watched his proceedings with as much, perhaps, of curiosity as of faith. When, one by one, he called them away from their ordinary occupations—Luke, from his practice of the healing art—Matthew, from his receipt of custom—Peter, and James, and John, from their fishing-nets and boats upon the sea of Galilee—they doubtless obeyed the summons. Some of them had been present when John the Baptist pointed him out as “the Lamb of God which should

take away the sins of the world." Others, informed by Andrew and Simon of the wisdom that fell from his lips during the day which the brothers spent with him in his lowly dwelling at Nazareth, either sought him out of their own accord, or hearkened willingly to his invitation, when he sent it to them through the instrumentality of others. But they one and all followed him at the outset, hoping, rather than believing, that God had at length visited his people, and that the Christ was come. The first miracle which he wrought, the very first proof that he afforded of his power to bend the common influences of nature to his own will, converted this hope into certainty. They saw him give his countenance to one of those friendly meetings which seldom in the days and in the land of the Patri-

archs degenerated into riot ; and the gentleness with which he supplied the necessities of a poor but generous entertainer won not more upon their reverence than their love. His glory was manifested forth when, at his bidding, the water became wine ; and they who had heretofore followed him in hope, clung to him henceforth in assurance. And though it be admitted that neither then nor for many months afterwards were their minds sufficiently enlarged to take in the true designs of God in sending his Son into the world, it is, nevertheless, certain that from that day forth their faith never wavered—no, not even in the dark hour when natural terror gained the mastery over them, and they fled from the Lord, and denied him, he being betrayed into the hands of his enemies. It was necessary, however, that

before others than the twelve, the evidences to his divine nature and commission should be submitted ; and we accordingly find that side by side with the revelations which he made of God's will and man's duty, went the performance of such acts as God's power alone is competent to effect. Of these, two are described in the Gospel for this morning's service ; and there are circumstances attendant upon both, which, besides that they appear to have been among the first miracles which the Lord publicly wrought, peculiarly fit them for our perusal and consideration at this season.

A reference to the chapter in St. Matthew's Gospel immediately preceding that to which our attention is now directed, will shew that, just before the performance of the acts of mercy recorded there, the

Lord had delivered to assembled thousands his celebrated sermon on the Mount. The same authority informs us that he spoke to auditors which were very greedy to learn; and that, when he brought his discourse to an end, "the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." His was no servile imitation of the tone or manner of those recognized teachers who, in their zeal for what they conceived to be, or desired others to accept as the honour of the law, forgot the graver matters of piety towards God, and universal good-will among men. He appealed to the common sense of mankind to weigh the difference between right and wrong. He placed men's moral obligations, as the creatures of a common Creator, as members of one great family,

upon their legitimate footing. He spoke of gentleness, meekness, self-denial, self-control; the forgiveness of wrong, the desire to benefit others; truth, singleness of character, piety of heart, much more of words and of deeds, as the qualifications which alone fit men for peace of mind here, and entrance into the rest of the sons of God hereafter. But not one word in all that long discourse has reference to new moons, sabbaths, tithes, sacrifices, or any other of the usages which were peculiar to the religious dispensation under which he himself was born. Why was this? Because he despised the customs of his forefathers—customs established by the authority of Jehovah himself, and only hurtful when, as was the case in the latter days, they had begun to usurp the place of that inward piety which they

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were given to shelter and defend? Surely not. The whole tenor of the Lord's life proves the reverse. There was not in all Judea a more scrupulous or strict adherent to the necessary usages of the fathers. We find him ever present at the great national festivals in the Temple. We follow him regularly, as the Sabbath day comes round, into one of the synagogues or houses of public prayer and instruction, which had sprung up since the return from the Babylonish captivity, in every town and village throughout the land. Yea, the first of the Lord's miracles, of which we read not long ago, exhibits Him in the light of a strict observer of the essential mysteries of the law. The poor leper, who cast himself in the Saviour's way, was healed, as he desired to be. Yet he who healed him, without any of

those laborious ceremonies which are enjoined in the Book of Leviticus, directed him, nevertheless, to go, and shew himself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them. But this is not all : scarcely had the healed leper withdrawn, scarcely was the Lord entered into the house where he purposed to pass the night, when there came to him a centurion, beseeching him and saying, “ Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.” Now, this centurion was not a Jew. The leper belonged to the house of Israel, and a wretched outcast he had indeed become, for the hand of God lay upon him ; and lepers, as is well known, felt the weight of God’s heavy hand, to an extent which was not experienced by any other class of persons. They were, in the sight of all men,

unclean. No one dared to approach them—no one dared to touch them. On the first appearance of the malady upon their skin, they were driven from their homes, from their kindred, from their very children, and not unfrequently perished by the way-side, from the lack of food and common shelter. Still, they belonged to the descendants of the Patriarch, and he who from afar, by casting a morsel of bread towards them, ministered to their more urgent necessities, was considered to have done well. But to befriend the Gentile in his hour of need, and above all a soldier of those Roman armies which kept Judea in subjection to a heathen yoke,—that was an offence against all the prejudices of the Jew—it was taking the children's bread and giving it to the dogs. See how the Lord conducted himself. The centurion's prayer

was uttered in an earnest tone, but with great humility. It expressed no more than a statement of the cause of the unhappy man's affliction. There was not so much as a direct petition that he to whom he made the statement would remove the evil. There was a mere declaration:—"Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." How was it answered? "Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him." Where was now the bigotry of the Jew? The leper, the Israelitish leper, had been commanded to go away, and perform all that Moses in the law enjoined in like cases; yet he who thus honoured the law among such as had been born and bred in its observances, exhibits no disinclination to make a Gentile and a foreign soldier, freely and without restriction, a partaker in his bounty. Are

there not set forth in all this, truths, new, perhaps, to the world as it was then constituted, yet worthy of the Son of God himself to make known? A moment's reflection will shew that there are; yea, the Lord himself has expressed them.

The purposes for which God sent his Son into the world, were two-fold; for the Son came to play the two-fold part of a universal Redeemer, and a universal Revealer of his Father. His death upon the cross accomplished the former of these ends; his life, conversation, and teaching, have accomplished the latter. Old truths long forgotten have by him again been brought prominently into light; and blending with others that in comparison with these may be said to be new, constitute that last and best religious dispensation under which we now live. The

old truths which the Lord revived may be expressed shortly in words like these ; that the Creator of heaven and earth is the common Father of all the beings which owe to him their existence, that by every rational soul which worships him in spirit and in truth he is worshipped acceptably. All distinctions of lineage and race which for a wise but temporary purpose the law had established, are thus done away. The whole world becomes once more, what it was when time began,—God's great temple. The African, the Asiatic, the native of Europe, the Red Indian of the far west, stand for ever and alike in God's presence. The same rule of right and wrong which applies to one of these applies to all the rest. In their barbarism some may not comprehend this ; yet thus it is, and he who is brought by God's great mercy to

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understand what God is, understands at the same time, and by the very same process, how God is to be served.

The new truths which the Saviour has revealed make known to us the arrangements of that mighty scheme whereby man is rendered once more the heir of immortality, and can find grace and strength to sustain him in his efforts to render this immortality a state of never-ending happiness. It is this indeed, the declaration of these great truths, and their establishment upon a basis which can never be shaken, which constitutes the Gospel, or glad tidings of salvation, in the reception of which we rejoice ; for man's duty to God and to his fellow-man has never been essentially different from what it is now. In the ages before the Flood, in the days of

the patriarchs,—under the law, in lands where the law was never heard of; it was precisely such as it is at this day, and will so continue to be while time runs on. But man's hopes have greatly opened upon him, man's prospects have immeasurably extended themselves, man's strength has accumulated to do this duty—not perfectly, for perfection is far from us—but in such a way as a God of infinite mercy will accept, through Christ Jesus, only since HE came, who in his Gospel has brought life and immortality to light.

The sanctions of our duty are so far changed, that we are urged to discharge it faithfully by the highest and holiest motives. Our duty, however, is precisely what it ever was. Think of what I am saying, and you will perceive

that I speak true. Forget, if you can, that there is a life beyond the present. Try to regard yourselves and your fellow-men as the mere creatures of a day, born, like the brutes that perish, to live a certain number of years upon the earth, and then to die and be heard of no more. I do not say that with the powers and faculties that belong to you, such a state of existence would satisfy your wants. There is so much in this passing life which comes short of our soul's yearnings—there are mixed up with its best blessings so many sources of disappointment and care, that were we cut off from the blessed prospect of a life beyond the grave, the best among us would be tempted to wish that he had never risen into conscious existence. Yet the truth still remains, that the true mode of

rendering society endurable—the surest means of extending a fair proportion of happiness to all its members—is to be found only so far as the whole of these endeavour each to do to others as they would these others should do to them. Man's duty, therefore, in all ages of the world, was the same ; and wherever men may have wandered away from it, or forgotten it in times of old, they did so because they were misled by false guides, or blinded by their own selfish prejudices.

But this cannot be again. Slowly, perhaps, yet steadily, the knowledge of the Lord is overspreading the earth. From land to land, the seeds of the Gospel are carried, and in proportion as these strike root downwards, and bear fruit upwards, prejudice and ignorance alike melt away. To whom is the world indebted for this ?

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To Him, who gave himself a ransom for our sins; who died that we might live, and rose again in order to convince us that a resurrection shall follow. And one of the earliest manifestations of this, his great design, one of the epiphanies or revelations of God's purposes to Gentile as well as to Jew, has this day, in the Gospel for the morning's service, been recalled to our remembrance. The Roman soldier and the Jewish beggar were both made partakers of Christ's bounty, and the declaration was by their common benefactor emitted, that "many more shall yet come from the east, and from the west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven."

Having stated all this, I do not think that there will be required many words

from me, in order to guide you into such a train of thinking as shall enable you to turn the great lesson to a just account. Remember, that though the Kingdom of Heaven, especially referred to by the Saviour, meant, in those days, his church or kingdom upon earth; and though the promise was abundantly fulfilled, by the flowing in of the Gentiles in countless numbers, the expression applies with equal force, and to a far more important purpose, to you, and to me, and to all, who at this hour worship God our Father through the Saviour. We are now the children of the Kingdom. We are towards Jehovah, what the Jews were of old, one and all his nominal servants; one and all heirs of his glory. Let us take care, that after the last solemn judgment has arrived, the fate shall not

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befal to us which is here threatened against the unbelievers of old. We would not narrow the limits of God's mercy in Christ if we could. Gladly, most gladly, shall we welcome to their mansions in Heaven, such as from the east and the west are, by his unerring justice, tempered by a mercy which knows no bounds, introduced there—whether they be the more virtuous of the heathen of our own day, or the wise and the good who lived and died in ignorance of the Scriptures long ago. If God see fit, through the blood of the atonement, to accept their imperfect services, greatly shall we rejoice. But let us take care, that when they are led forward with joy we be not thrust out in shame : for he who is not received where angels strike their golden harps shall pass into outer darkness, where

is weeping, and gnashing of teeth. Do you ask me how this is to be avoided? I will tell you: worship God, who is a Spirit, and never absent from you for a moment, all day long in spirit and in truth. Do to your brother man, in every situation, as you feel that you could desire that he should do to you. And then, reposing no trust in your own righteousness, look at last for acceptance through him, who, as he died for your sins, has risen again for your justification. This is the path, and the only one, that leads to Heaven. I pray God, for the Saviour's sake, that ye may find it.

SERMON XIV.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

MATTHEW VIII. 25.

“ And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us : we perish.”

THE Gospel for this morning's service carries us forward another stage along the path which, at this season of the year, the Church requires us to traverse. By manifestations of his power, still more and more marvellous, by the exhibition of his glory in the sight of the whole universe, the Lord Jesus there establishes

his claim to be received as the world's Saviour, and the instructor of mankind in the will of their Father which is in heaven. For the miracles of which you not long ago read the account have each a meaning of its own beyond that which seems to lie upon the surface. They are epiphanies of God's Christ ;—demonstrations that he is the Lord not of sensible nature alone, but of those parts of God's creation that lie, as yet, beyond the reach of our senses. And they communicate to such as receive him in this high and holy faith a moral lesson, of which it is impossible to overrate the importance. Let us look at them both, with the view of gathering from them, as far as we are able, the kind of instruction of which I am now speaking.

The stilling of the wind and calming of

the sea by a word, is an act of marvellous power. We feel it to be such; yet because the roar of the tempest and the heaving of the billows are sights and sounds familiar to us, our faith, however wavering and weak it may be, is scarcely offended. We imagine that the whole transaction comes within the reach of our common sense to apprehend it. Persons to whom it is given to command the very elements do not, to be sure, meet us in the ordinary walks of life; and were any such to cross us, and we to become witnesses of the exercise of their powers, we should exclaim as the Apostles did, on the quieted Lake of Tiberias, "What manner of men are these?" Still, as both parties to the transaction are, or seem to be, on a level, so to speak, with ourselves, we are not unwilling to believe that such

a miracle may have been wrought long ago ; and might, should the circumstances of the times and the moral and religious condition of living men require, be wrought again. I am not sure that our faith expands itself quite so readily to take in and believe, literally as it is written, the narrative of the dispossession of the demoniacal Gergesenes. For here we have to deal with beings of whose existence there can be no direct proof. The broad gulf which separates the living from the dead has never in our day, nor to our personal knowledge, been passed ; and still less are we familiar with the spirits of light and of darkness, where-with the Scriptures declare that heaven and hell are peopled. Moreover, granting that such beings are—and to corroborate the assumption we have the uni-

versal belief of men in all ages since the world began—there is something which startles, if it do not offend, in the idea that evil spirits should have ever been permitted, by the Maker and Governor of the universe, to pass into the bodies of men to torment them. These things jar and plague us. These things, unless our faith be of the highest order, trouble us while we read. Is there any just cause for this anxiety? I do not think that there is; and before adverting to the former and more simple of the two marvels, I will endeavour to explain to you why the matter presents itself to me in this light.

If the Bible were not what we feel that it is, written by the inspiration of God; if it were nothing more than a very ancient history—the most ancient by far of

all the histories that are extant—we should have no right whatever to disbelieve the reality of any event considered as such merely because it is described or narrated there. On the contrary, our reason would urge us to view every statement in the volume through a favourable rather than through an unfavourable medium ; that is to say, to believe the history whenever the matter submitted there for our consideration, neither is nor seems to be at variance with the common opinions of mankind. Now, the common opinions of mankind have ever been, that we are not the only rational creatures of the great Creator. There never was an age which did not believe in the existence of beings both higher and lower than man. Rude ages and untutored people have clothed their gods and demons in all manner of fantastic colours ;

but there they still are, living, at least in the universal belief of mankind, and exercising the greatest influence over men's thoughts and actions. Now, there must be some foundation for this belief. Neither individual men nor whole communities do or can believe ought for which there is absolutely no foundation. In fact, you cannot think a thought of which the elements or component parts do not exist somewhere within God's universe. You may imagine a creature of the most grotesque shape,—you may dream of lakes of fire, and rivers flowing with blood,—but though such things, in their compounded state, exist nowhere, the elements out of which your fancy has framed them abound on all sides of you. So it is with respect to spirits of light and of darkness. If such things did not exist in some

way, and under some system, the idea of their existence never could have entered into the minds of men. The universal belief of their existence, however disputed among the fanciful and inquisitive it may be, amounts to a strong moral proof that they do exist.

The nature of things requires, however, that the knowledge of the existence of these beings should come to us by a process which is above our nature. Earth, as we possess it, is not the dwelling-place of spirits, either of light or of darkness. They do not mix familiarly with us. They may be near us, perhaps often, but we neither see nor hear them. At least the case is so now—now that man has become the heir of mortality. But was it always so? The Bible assures us that it was not, and the assurance which the Bible gives is at once con-

firmed by the universal belief of which we have just been speaking, and constitutes the fountain-head whence this river of faith, with all its many streams and branches, issues. From the Bible we learn that there was a time when man, as yet innocent, held daily intercourse with the angels that surround God's throne. The history of that time is brief—there was no need to make it otherwise—for the Bible was written rather to be our guide through earth to heaven, than to pain us with an accurate description of all that was lost by the expulsion of the first pair from Paradise. Yet brief as it is, there is enough in it to impress the conviction on our minds, that had death by sin never entered into the world, the barrier which now separates the higher from the lower orders of God's rational creatures would

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have been at least less generally impassable than we find it. Yea, and more than this. The Bible describes the early days even of fallen man, as cheered and sustained, here and there, for obvious and most wise purposes, by occasional visits of God's angels to earth. Abraham was thus favoured, so were Isaac and Jacob; and out of their communings with the great Angel of the Covenant arose that admirable yet stern polity, which, amid a long night of religious darkness elsewhere, preserved among a single people the pure worship of one God, the Father of men and angels. Where are we now? At the source or well-head of all that universal belief in the existence of gods and demons, of angels and of devils, which has prevailed among men from the beginning of time and still exists

everywhere. We believe that there are spirits, both of light and of darkness, not only because the Bible tells us so, but because we find this belief cherished by the savage not less than by the Christian. And we know that such belief never could have sprung up had there not been a root of truth to sustain and nourish it.

Again, the order of nature, as it is submitted to our senses and our experience, goes far to prove, that this our belief is a just one. There is, with an endless variety in the things which she produces, no variableness or shadow of turning in the principle of nature's operations. All is orderly and just with her. The links that connect the highest earthly intelligence with mere dead matter are, in this our world, so closely and intimately interwoven, that we can go down from man,

without overleaping one of them, to the pile of dust on the road-side, or the grain of sand by the sea-shore. There is no void or empty place in nature as we see it. Can we believe for a moment, that all above us is vacancy? Is it credible that between us and the Almighty and most wise Creator, there should be only a huge void? Surely this is not credible. Not to speak of the moral certainty, that each of the countless stars which we gaze upon as they shine through the clear frosty ether, has its rational inhabitants—can we doubt that beyond them, and beyond others, too, there are worlds which rise one above the other continually: so continually, that the wing of imagination itself, strong though its pinion be, droops in the vain endeavour to carry us over the courts of that mighty temple which the Creator has established for himself?

It cannot be but that in God's universe there are innumerable beings just as superior to us in their mental faculties and in their bodily frames as we are superior to the meanest insect that crawls. And if there be superior intelligences, why not others that are fallen and degraded?—yea, why may it not be that the order of things which prevails now, has prevailed before, and will prevail for ever; namely, that God's rational creatures being subjected by their kinds to their seasons of trial, pass away, after this trial ends, to places higher or lower, according as, by the tenor of their lives, they have prepared themselves for each? “In my Father's house,” says the Lord, “are many mansions.” Does not the expression seem to teach the very doctrine of which I am now treating? Will not our places

in the new state of being into which death introduces us be determined according to the tempers, and dispositions, and tastes, which we have acquired and confirmed here upon earth ?

I think then that he who hesitates to believe that there are spirits both of light and of darkness in God's universe, only shews that the grasp of his mind is exceedingly limited. He cannot lift a thought beyond himself and the things of sight and touch which surround him. He is not fit to be raised, when the burden of the flesh is laid aside, to any higher state than that of which he is now in possession. But granting all this, what right have we to assume that the spirits of darkness were ever permitted to pass in reality out of their own gloomy dwelling-place, and to enter into the bodies of men ? I answer,

that this is one of those points, our acceptance or rejection of which will not affect our soundness in the Christian faith one jot. We are nowhere required to declare, as one of the articles of our belief, "I believe in the reality of possessions by the devil long ago." Such possessions may have been real, or they may have been mere delusions in the minds of the afflicted. But there can be no doubt that the Lord by a word removed them. And this is all that was required to establish in the minds of his disciples a firm conviction that he, Jesus, was, what we too believe him to be, the Lord of all things in earth, and above the earth, and below. For there is no doubt that the reality of such possessions was believed in our Lord's day and for several ages after it. And as the Lord came, not to correct

men's views on subjects of natural history, nor yet to instruct them in the healing art; but to make known to them the vital truth, that after death comes the judgment; he did enough when he answered these wretched men according to the tenor of their demand, and delivered them from the malady under which they laboured. And as to the destruction of the swine, that may be accounted for in many ways, without tying us down on a question so delicate to one mode of interpretation. For example, there can be no doubt that the wretched men to whom the Lord shewed mercy were among the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This we know because, except in the case of the Canaanitish mother, the Lord never wrought a miracle of healing in any other. But in the eyes of the Israelite, swine

were unclean animals; and persons labouring under a paroxysm either of madness or newly awakened zeal, were not unlikely to shew, by some such process as we have read about to-day, their abhorrence of such as trafficked in them. Be this, however, as it may, the whole transaction was calculated to satisfy the Lord's disciples, that He whom they followed was supreme in God's universe. It was a second Epiphany or manifestation of that glory which first won their faith at the marriage-feast in Galilee.

And now for a brief moment look back with me upon that other miracle which established the fact of the Lord's supremacy over the elements; which drew from the persons embarked with him in the same boat the exclamation—"What manner of man is this, that even the winds

and the sea obey him?" Of that, considered as a manifestation of power and glory, we have nothing whatever to say. It is a fact recorded in the volume of truth. We have only to read, to believe, and to adore. Yet the moral conveyed to us by means of it is one of the most important which frail and erring men can receive. When the Lord seems to have forsaken us, how are not our barks tossed about by the winds and waves of trouble and of sin. When the Lord sleeps, as it were, and regards us not, there is no safety for us anywhere, either in body or in soul. When is it that the Lord appears thus to neglect us? Only after we have long neglected ourselves; only after sin has established his dominion over us. Yea, one sin—one sin in particular—to which we become the slaves; which eats

into the very core of our hearts, which overspreads our whole moral nature with leprosy, which is hurrying us on and on to inevitable destruction. Never till it comes to this, does the Lord forsake us utterly. He may sleep, or seem to sleep, when temptations, many and strong, surround us. He may permit the storm to vent its fury upon us for awhile, but still is he near at hand ; and the same bitter cry which reached him on that night of darkness and of terror, will, if it be uttered in faith, reach him again. “ Save us, we perish.” Lord save us indeed ! If thou art extreme to mark what we have done amiss, if the limits of thy mercy be narrowed, or thy mediation fail, then are we lost beyond redemption. For the sins of our past lives are more than we can number or express, and there is no

health in us. Is it even so? Have the floods gone over you thus? Cry yet again, yea, louder, and with deeper intonation. Not all at once, nor in a moment, is he who has greatly fallen lifted up again. Go to the Lord once more, yet go without misgivings. Let your tread be soft and your eyes cast down, as becomes those who feel their own great unworthiness; but as ye hope for peace here and hereafter, doubt not. "Oh ye of little faith!" must never be applied by the Saviour to such as fear for their souls, and come to Him to deliver them. He who distrusts either the power or the will of the Redeemer to save him, offers to the Redeemer great wrong. The Lord will save you if ye but permit Him. What is meant by this?

There are two classes of persons in the

world, both of them sinners, and therefore both in peril of their own souls, of which the state of one, though it seem comparatively safe to us, is a thousand times more dangerous than that of the other. The former are they who never think at all; who are too much occupied with the events of the hour, to waste a care upon sins past, or the judgment that is coming; yet who would resent as a grievous wrong the charge, were you to bring it against them, that they are living without God in the world. These men's sins may be in their own eyes, and in the eyes of society, small. But they have no principle of faith within. They are therefore in peril where they least expect it.

There are others, who, having been once more deeply stained with guilt, are yet awaked to a sense of their

own unworthiness; who, fearing and trembling, seek the Lord continually in deep and bitter prayer when his eye alone is upon them. No matter what the nature of their offences may have been, these are in a far more favourable plight than the former. Their vessel reels and staggers, but they know it. They are conscious of their own danger, and seeing that their own exertions to avoid shipwreck avail not, they cry to Him who is at all times able to save. They may escape—yea, they will escape—if intermitting not the prayer which they may have learned only yesterday, they struggle, at the same time, to master the temptation which has so long mastered them. Are ye of this number? I pray God that ye may be now, or may have been in former times. For well I know

that, of all who may have attained even to early manhood, comparatively few can have escaped that moral contamination, which leaves a deep stain upon the soul.

What, then, remains for you to do? This, and no more. Remember that you, like the Apostles, are embarked on a stormy sea, and that your voyage, as far as we can trace it, will end in the grave. But it does not end there. Through that dark gulf ye pass either into heaven or into hell. Hold fast by Him who alone can pilot you safe, and he will render all about you, both now and at the hour of death, "a great calm."

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